PART TWO: SEEING

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

A Research Stance

This chapter tells the story of my work as a researcher. My purpose in this role was to learn from and with a classroom teacher as she sought to move her ideals about teaching and learning that "begins with seeing the student" into real practices. My hope was that this study might, as Shor (1992) describes, "stay grounded in the realities of teaching" (p. 170). To direct the research towards this purpose and hope, I chose to do a case study, using qualitative research methodology.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) characterize qualitative research as "immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study, that values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, and that is primarily descriptive and relies on people's words as primary data" (p. 11). In alignment with this description, the research design for this project involved immersion into the culture within Sarah's classroom, as well as a significant amount of interaction between Sarah, her students, and myself. While I did rely on people's words as primary data, my data collection further included frequent observation of and participation with the persons and activities within the classroom setting. In this sense, the research design was ethnographic in nature. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest, ethnographic methods allow researchers to participate in people's lives, to watch what happens, listen to what is said, ask questions and collect data to illuminate the issue under study.

Delamont (1992) purports that both "qualitative research," the wide-ranging term, and "ethnography" imply that the researcher values the views, perspectives, opinions, prejudices and beliefs of the informants, actors or respondents she is studying, and is

going to take them seriously (p. 7). My intent throughout this project was to pay careful attention to Sarah's words and actions as I made an effort to explore how she understood her world. In order to accomplish this, I immersed myself within that world. Burnett (1974) explains the role of participant observer that ethnographers use as a primary data collection technique towards this purpose. He writes:

> "Participant observers live as much as possible with the individuals they are investigating, trying to blend in and taking part in their daily activities. Participant observers watch what people do, listen to what people say, and interact with participants. Ethnographers become learners, so as to be socialized by participants into the group under investigation" (in LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p. 196).

As much as I was able to, I "lived within" Sarah's classroom, taking part in a wide range of activities which occurred there. Sarah introduced me to her students as "another teacher" with whom they might work at various points or seek assistance from. In this role, I read with children, listened to their stories and reports, facilitated their research efforts, sat in on small group work, supervised play and study times, and provided instructions at various learning stations. In all cases, I acted based upon Sarah's explicit needs and directions. Over time, I was "socialized" into the role of assisting teacher, whose presence in the classroom was viewed less and less as out of the ordinary by the children. Sarah laid the foundation for this perception to be established by sanctioning my role and presence within the world of her classroom. In this sense, she made my stance as ethnographer possible.

Throughout this project, I sensed that Sarah placed within my care a sacred trust - her work with children, to whom she is deeply committed. Yvonna Lincoln (1996) describes such a sacredness as issuing "from the collaborative and egalitarian aspects of the relationships created in the research-to-action continuum." (p. 17). In this respect, I intended to shape this project as a "research partnership," rather than an individually directed inquiry. Weiler (1988) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) describe accounts of collaborative research which they have participated in with classroom teachers. In both cases, their research efforts are directly related to and have the potential to inform the classroom work of the teachers involved. In this tradition, I have hoped that my work

with Sarah might serve not only my own interests, but also contribute in some sense to her purposes and interests, as well as the interests of others who work daily with children. Lincoln (1996) describes this characteristic of qualitative research as "communitarian," explaining that it "recognizes that research takes place within, and is addressed to, some community; it is also accurately labeled because of the desire of those who discuss such research to have it serve the purposes of the community in which it was carried out, rather than serving solely the community of knowledge producers and policy makers" (pp. 10-11). Given this desire, I have critically examined my research in Sarah's classroom in retrospect, humbly wondering whether or not my descriptions and analyses of her work have in any way served her needs. I hope that they have.

I would be naive, though, to consider my research to be solely guided by Sarah's purposes and needs. In fact, my accounting of the daily occurrences and interactions in Sarah's classroom are just that, MY accounting. Lemke (1995) cautions that no researcher or writer can work from an "objective, God's-eye view." He continues, "No one sees *the* world as *it is*" (p. 4). He explains that each person works from his or her own particular social position, making meanings that are shaped by the kinds of life experiences that we have had. Garrison (1994) adds to this conception, stating that, "Building a body of research involves choosing for a purpose, and that involves our deepest personal and cultural beliefs and values. This is why educational research can never be theory or value neutral" (p. 11). My own prior experiences as a teacher and learner, my beliefs about children and schooling, what I value, the social and cultural groups with whom I identify myself - all of these pieces of "who I am" have shaped my research. Lincoln (1996) advises of the need to acknowledge the "position" of the author of a research work, explaining that "any text which displays honesty or authenticity 'comes clean' about its own stance," going on to say that claims of detachment and author objectivity are "barriers to quality, not insurance of having achieved it" (p. 10).

As author of this work, I realize that my values, experiences and positionings have influenced not only the selection of this project, but also specific aspects that I have chosen to focus on throughout my research, as well as means of analysis that I have utilized. As discussed in chapter one, not only my positioning as a college instructor with elementary school teaching experience, but also my study of critical pedagogy and

41

interest in democratic educational practices frame both my selection of this study and my movement as researcher within it. Krieger (1991) supports the need to self-reflectively examine our "positions" as researchers, stating that, "the self is not a contaminant, but . . . it is key to what we know. The self is not something that can be disengaged from knowledge or from research processes. Rather we need to understand the nature of our own participation in what we know" (p. 30). In this regard, I view my accounting of this research as my own interpretation or my "reading" of what I perceive to be Sarah's construction of her world. My personal perspectives have become intertwined with what I refer to as data and as analysis of data. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) explain this as a "reflexive" process, writing, "Reflexivity involves the recognition that an account of reality does not simply mirror reality . . . the process is one of reflexive or dialectical interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point, shaping not only analysis but how social events come to be perceived and written up as data in the first place (pp. 167 and 213).

As I evaluate my personal participation in Sarah's work, I believe that, in a sense, her directions and purposes with her kids were extended through me. As Sarah and I came to know one another better over time, our trust in each other grew. We learned that we held in common many values and ideals, that we had read many of the same texts and studies under some of the same professors, and that we shared many concerns and hopes related to teaching children. As I became increasingly aware of and excited about Sarah's work with her kids, I felt more comfortable acting as an "assisting teacher" in her classroom. I also noticed that as I acted more and more comfortable in this role, Sarah began to offer me increasingly more opportunities to assist her and work with her kids. Over time, I came to view Sarah and myself as co-members of what Oldfather and West (1994) refer to as a "shared culture." Because of our common beliefs and purposes, I feel that I was a support for Sarah's work. Oldfather and West express further, however, their conception of the variations and distinctions that characterize individuals within a shared culture by developing the metaphor of participants in qualitative research as jazz musicians. They write:

> "Jazz musicians participate in a shared culture. They carry common (but not identical) repertoires, and a common body of knowledge that allows them to make music together. The music is guided by a deep structure of

chord progressions and themes. Using this unifying structure as a base, jazz musicians create recurring and sometimes surprising variations on the underlying themes - weaving together varied qualities of tone, harmony, rhythm, volume, pace and voice" (p. 22).

In analyzing my work within Sarah's classroom, it has been important for me to acknowledge and consider not only the common themes that I recognize, but also to be alert to the individual repertoires that both of us possess and exhibit. I have attempted to be open to considering what I might have initially perceived as "deficient from" or "discrepant to" my ideals as, instead, a "surprising variation." My hope is to deconstruct what I observe in terms of who Sarah is, rather than in terms of how closely she aligns to what I might expect to see. In order to do this, it has been vital that I acknowledge what I "expect to see," revisiting the values and beliefs that I have constructed, based upon my own experiences and positionings. Reflecting upon and writing about my past and current work as both teacher and student, as I have done in chapter one, has provided this opportunity for me to some degree.

First Steps

My research unofficially began in June 1996, when I met with Sarah, and her colleagues, Kelly Ainsworth and Rebecca Matthews, for the first time. At that time I had not yet decided to work primarily with Sarah; I was considering how I might construct a study that followed the work of all three teachers. The three teachers agreed to meet with me, based upon my request. I suggested a local restaurant and offered to treat them to lunch as a courtesy. As described in chapter one, this encounter was one of several that I would have with Sarah, Kelly and Rebecca over the course of the summer. In addition, I became better acquainted with each teacher's espoused beliefs and ideals by listening to audiotaped interviews that each had completed with a fellow graduate student whom we all knew mutually. Finally, the week before the school year was to begin, I interviewed each teacher individually in the fashion that Briggs (1986) describes as loosely structured, open ended interviews. Through these interviews, I was able to learn more about each one's teaching history, what she valued and what she hoped for her classroom during the coming year. Goodson (1994) suggests that understanding educators as people is essential to a contextualized study of their work in the classroom, explaining that:

"practice is a good deal more than the technical things we do in classrooms - it relates to who we are, to our whole approach to life" (p. 29). He proposes a form of research that links the analysis of a teacher's life and work. Following this line of thought, I invited these teachers to reflect upon their past educational experiences, both as teachers and learners, to help me better understand and "place" what they brought into their present classrooms.

As the school year began, I came to a point where decisions needed to be made concerning the research design that I hoped to follow. My process was consistent with what Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe as "funneling," an occurrence that often takes place during a qualitative research inquiry. They explain that the beginning of the study is the wide end, and as data is collected and ideas are reviewed and explored, over time, specific decisions are made and the study develops focus. In this sense, my initial contacts and interactions with all three teachers informed a shift that was made soon after - narrowing the study to focus specifically upon the work of one teacher, rather than attempting to work with all three. When I presented my proposed research design to my faculty committee, they advised that an in depth consideration of one teacher's work would likely be more substantive than a more general study in several classrooms.

Determining which teacher to work with was not easy for me. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the researcher's tasks as determining the group(s) for which the initial research question is appropriate, the context(s) that are potentially associated with the research question, the time periods to which the research question might be relevant, and the artifacts particular groups of interest to the researcher have produced (p. 64). Given the encounters that I had had with each teacher, my initial sense was that each of their classrooms could provide for me an environment relevant to my research questions and interests. Additionally, I believed that the foundations had been established with each teacher toward the possibility of building what Lincoln (1996) refers to as "relational" research, "a research grounded in the recognition and valuing of 'connectedness' between researcher and researched" (p. 24). Louden (1992) adds to this idea by emphasizing the importance of relationship to this type of research: "participative research can only take place in the context of well developed collaborative relationships between teachers and researchers, relationships built on mutual trust and

complementary interests" (p. 178). I felt that I shared complementary interests with each teacher, and that efforts towards mutual trust were already in progress.

My eventual choice to work with Sarah, rather than Kelly or Rebecca, was based upon two added considerations. First, I was curious about the unique situation which Sarah and Kelly would share in the fall, specifically the support that their building principal had expressed for their values and ideas, as well as the fact that they would be teaching "next door" to one another in the same grade level. I believed that these dynamics might contribute to my understanding of the impact of building context and "support network" upon their work. This consideration moved me toward selecting either Sarah or Kelly as my primary teacher. Second, because Sarah had obtained status as a tenured teacher within the school division, while Kelly would be new to the division, I felt that Sarah might be less vulnerable as a subject of research. Although my intentions did not include placing any teacher at "risk," I was aware that my presence in the classroom may draw attention to her work.

Based upon these reasons, I contacted all three teachers to discuss with them the narrower focus that I now anticipated I might consider. At this point, Sarah affirmed her willingness to allow me to work in her classroom. Kelly and Rebecca expressed their understandings of my need to "narrow" the study as well, although both mentioned that they would certainly miss the added help that I might have provided them and their students. Kelly added, however, that she and Sarah intended to "share" students at various points and plan many joint endeavors, thus she suggested that perhaps we would work together, at least to some degree, on many occasions over the course of the upcoming year.

Carrying further LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) delineation of the researcher's tasks, I then considered "the time periods to which the research question may be relevant" (p. 64). Ideally, I hoped that I might begin my work on day one of the new school year, following Delamont's (1992) advice that "the opening days of a new academic year are especially productive for researchers, because rules are explicitly discussed, procedures explained and justified, social relationships are established, and the negotiations leading to a working partnership are begun" (p. 86). In pursuit of experiencing this beginning of the year phenomenon, I did, indeed, visit Sarah's

45

classroom during the first week of September, to take part in the sharing of legacy boxes which each student had created. At this point, however, I was sanctioned as a visiting guest rather than a researcher, because my official permissions to pursue the study had not yet been granted. In fact, the process of securing all of the necessary approvals took almost two months. I was frustrated by this, but ultimately restructured the time period of my research in order to follow all required protocol. I learned, as several qualitative researcher scholars have noted (Wax, 1971; Gibson, 1976, 1982; LeCompte, 1975), that entry problems can necessitate a reconceptualization of specific research focuses. In my situation, rather than considering primarily the early establishment of Sarah's work with her students as I had initially envisioned, I shifted my focus toward considering the evolution and growth of Sarah's work with her students over the balance of the school year.

My focus also shifted significantly during the permission-seeking process in regard to whom I might consider as subjects for my research. I had initially hoped to interview not only Sarah and other adults concerning her work, but also Sarah's students, concerning their experiences in her classroom over the course of time. I was cautioned by a university faculty member, though, that it may be unwise to ask young children to serve as primary research subjects, particularly if their participation in interviews or work with me might take away from their time spent in classroom learning. Taking this counsel seriously, I chose to solicit permission to interview only Sarah and other consenting adults. I asked permission to observe, interact with and participate amongst Sarah's students only across situations which were regular parts of their school day. Although I relized that this limited the scope of my research, I wanted to be careful to respect the rights and needs of these children.

For this project, official consent was required at three levels, (individual, building and division) in order to secure access to Sarah's classroom setting. As described, I began by asking for Sarah's consent. Next, I contacted her building principal, John Dixon, by phone to ask whether or not he might be receptive to my presence as a researcher within the building. He requested that we meet to discuss my proposal further, and we did so. We talked briefly about my general research questions, as well as the specific methodology which I planned to utilize to conduct the research. During our

conversation he expressed his support of my request. I offered to provide him with a copy of the complete proposal package which I would then submit to the school division's Director of Research. Over the course of several weeks I prepared this proposal, in conjunction with the completion of my prospectus examination. The proposal included a projected abstract and timeline for the research, consideration of its relevance and validity, and description of the data collection, analysis and reporting methods that I planned to use, as well as my understanding of any costs and benefits to participants that the study might involve. Because I had not yet finalized with my faculty committee the decision to work solely in Sarah's classroom, my submitted proposal to the school division requested permission to work in the classrooms of all three teachers. I received notification of my project's approval four weeks later. (See Appendix A for Approval Letter).

Subsequent to the receipt of this approval, I submitted a "Request for Approval of Investigation Involving Human Subjects" to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This request was accompanied by the required development of protocol, as well as Informed Consents for all anticipated participants. (See Appendix B for Copies of Informed Consents). In the process of creating these consent forms, I realized that it would be impossible for me to personally guarantee that a person's participation in this study would never be identified by anyone. I believed that I could, however, realistically promise and commit myself toward not using participants' actual names or the names of their schools, city or students in any of my research materials or writings. I could also assure participants that I would not verbally identify their names to others with whom I discuss this project, without their consent. Following a practice suggested by Davies (1993), I asked Sarah to choose her own pseudonym, which I have since used throughout all writings related to this work. For other project participants, I have attempted to select pseudonyms which complement what I perceive to be their personal characteristics.

I was informed that my request to proceed with this study had been approved by the IRB in early November, 1996.

Establishing My Presence as a Researcher

On Monday morning, November 4, 1996, I found my way to Eastside Elementary

School. Having traveled to the building on several previous occasions to talk with Sarah and to her building principal, as well as to visit in Sarah's class at the beginning of the school year, I had no difficulty finding it. Eastside is located on the perimeter of Valley City limits, situated in a southern metropolitan region with an approximate population of 229,000.

Valley City, which emerged as a railroad boom town in the 1800's, is now a central point for industry and tourism in the region (Valley City of Virginia, 1995). I learned from the city's "Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator" that locations within the city are commonly referred to according to their "quarter," whether southwest, northwest, etc. Of the four quarters, southwest city is primarily populated by a white, middle class population. Northwest city holds many of the historic Valley City neighborhoods, as well as the majority of the city's urban housing developments. Its population is largely African American. Southeast city is sometimes referred to as a "poor white" region, home to many blue collar workers and their families. Northeast city is a unique blend of old city neighborhoods, housing developments, and newer middle class homes. Its population is racially and socioeconomically diverse. Beyond the city limits lies Valley County, as well as a small, independent township on the east side of the city, and an independent city on the west side. All of these outer regions are predominantly populated by white, middle class households (Census Bureau Figures, 1991). The entire valley is situated within a mountainous region.

Eastside Elementary School is located near the eastern boundary of the city's northwest quarter. It is situated within a neighborhood of small homes and apartment buildings. The school building appears to be a single story structure from its front entrance - a large block in the center, with a wing that extends in an H shape on either side, and a separate cafeteria building settled behind one of the wings. Although not apparent from the front, much of the building has two levels, with the lower level built into the hillside underneath the back half of the central block, as well as one of the wings.

As I found a parking spot on November 4th and got ready to enter the building, I wondered what my work at Eastside would be like. Would Sarah feel comfortable with me present in her classroom? What about her students? What types of expectations would Sarah have of me over the course of my work with her? Would I be able to serve

her needs and interests in any way? It was too early in our working relationship to characterize what our work together might be like. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that "entry negotiation requires time, patience and sensitivity to the rhythms and norms of a group." My hope was to listen, observe and take cues from Sarah as I made efforts to become an accepted presence in her classroom. Noddings (1984) describes a state of "active listening" that qualitative researchers enter into, explaining it as "a precreative mode characterized by outer quietude and inner voices and images, by absorption and sensory concentration. The one so engrossed is listening, looking, feeling" (p. 34).

After signing in at the school office and picking up a visitor's badge, as Mr. Dixon had asked me to do on each of my visits, I walked down the hallway, past the gymnasium, toward the far wing which housed Sarah's classroom. As I entered the wing, I first passed Kelly Ainsworth's room, then came to Sarah's room next door. My first decision as a researcher was that of "where should I sit?" Sarah was in the process of pulling pieces of paper, which she referred to as "listening coupons," out of large manila envelope. As she drew the coupons out she read them and announced who would be the "picnic people" for the week. After this was accomplished, she welcomed me immediately, and asked the students if anyone could remember who I was. A tall African American boy, Evan, said that he did remember me, that I had been the lady who was there for the legacy box sharing. Sarah gave him a listening coupon for remembering. None of the children could recall my name, though, so Sarah asked me to write it on the board, which I did.

Because Sarah was standing beside a small table as she spoke to the class, I initially sat a few feet away from her, with my notebook and pen in hand, taking notes as Sarah spoke. The table was located in front of a blackboard which spanned the left wall of the classroom, when viewed from the back. I guessed that this blackboard was not frequently written on, because charts and signs were taped onto it, covering most of its surface. Another blackboard ran along the front of the classroom, flanked by two bulletin boards. Alphabet display cards and posters were hung above it. Although this blackboard was clear of charts and signs during my first visit, I realized over the course of the year that Sarah periodically hung signs on it for instructional purposes. I learned,

too, that she generally used this blackboard to write on if she needed to (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. The front wall within Sarah's classroom.

Cabinets were situated above and below a countertop and sink area that ran along about 2/3 of the right wall of the classroom. Parallel to the cabinets, leaving an aisle in between, was a long rectangular table with supplies sitting on it, labeled "writing center" (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. The writing center was positioned parallel to the right wall of the classroom.

Along the back third of that wall there was a window that extended from floor to ceiling. Sarah had placed a bright blue rug remnant, approximately 10' by 12' in size, in the corner space in front of the window. Along the perimeter of the rug that ran from the window toward the middle of the room sat a white wooden rocking chair, as well as several block crates stacked one on top of another, with an open "entry" space to the rug area located past the crates, furthest from the window. A large bookshelf and several crates sat along with back wall that flanked the rug area. Both the shelf and these crates were filled with books. The fourth edge of the rug area extended from the back wall toward the center of the room. A long, rectangular table was situated along this edge, marked "puzzle table." The remainder of the back wall, past the rug area, housed a computer table, a rolling cart with supplies on it labeled "mail center," and an open coat closet. The wide doorway, which was essentially an open space between cinder block walls, spanned about 8 feet, running from the coat closet to where the left wall blackboard began (See Figure 3).
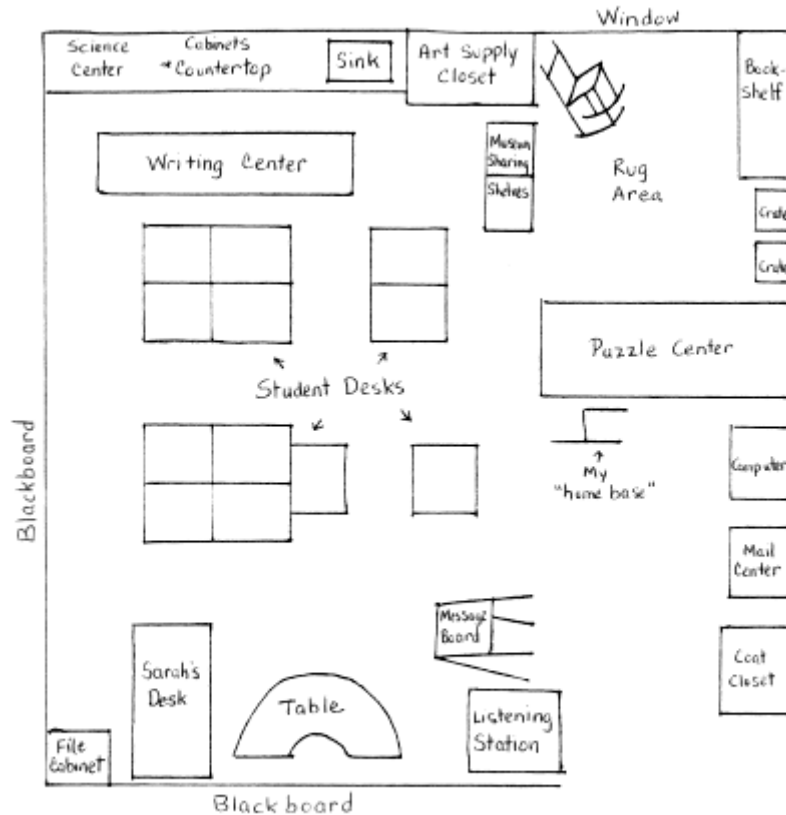
Figure 3. A diagram of the spaces and furniture within Sarah's classroom.

Sarah's desk was placed in the front left corner, in front of a file cabinet. It was cleared of materials in the middle, with supplies arranged along its edges. Over the course of my work in Sarah's room, I never observed her sitting at her desk while the children were present. On a few occasions, she sat there to write in her plan book or jot down notes while the children were in classes such as music or physical education. Students' desk were arranged in four clusters in the middle of the room. In each cluster, the desks faced each other, and Sarah referred to the groups as Table 1, 2, 3 and 4. The number of desks at each "table" differed in size, ranging from a group of four to an individual desk. There were 12 children in the classroom when I began my work.

When the group shifted from their desks to the "rug area" about a half an hour after I arrived, I relocated to a seat at the puzzle table. I sat in a chair on the computer side of the table, situated in such a way that I could look across the table towards the rug area as I wrote. I felt comfortable in this position because I sensed that my notetaking

was less conspicuous than it had been at the table near the left wall blackboard. Whether Sarah was instructing the kids on the rug area or from either of the two chalkboards, my seat at the puzzle table put me behind the students, with their gazes turned away from me. On occasion Sarah used the rolling chart which sat at the end of the puzzle table nearest the students' desks. When this occurred, I was stationed just behind the chart that the children were looking at. Across the course of my work in Sarah's room, this table became my home base (See Figure 4). Although I worked in and around all areas of the room at various points, I generally returned to the puzzle table whenever I took notes. Over time, when Sarah or her students wanted to leave me a note or a picture, they would leave the items at the puzzle table for me. I began to feel that this space was allocated as "Mrs. Murrill's desk" as my work in the classroom progressed. It was significant to me that Sarah allowed me freedom to choose where I would station myself, providing me with the initial sense that I was a decision maker within my role as researcher.

Figure 4. The puzzle table which became my "home base" for taking fieldnotes.

A critical consideration for me during my early days in Sarah's classroom was the degree of participation that I would have with her and her students, as well as their expectations of what my "job" in their classroom entailed. Given the research permissions that I had been granted, I was aware that I could not formally interview

Sarah's children in situations that I contrived. Instead, I had been sanctioned to interview only Sarah and other consenting adults. I had also received permission to observe and interact with Sarah and her students as they proceeded through the events and discussions that made up their school day. It was this observing/interacting role that I had to work out for myself, determining what forms and degrees of participation I would have.

Reflecting upon my early efforts to work out my "place" amongst class members, Gold's (1958) categories for participant observation are helpful. He classifies participation according to the kind of the interaction in which the researcher engages and how aware participants are that they are being studied; categories include: the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer. I perceived my position to be "participant-as-observer," differing from complete participation in that I was not working under cover, and varying from observer-as-participant in that my interactions with Sarah and her students went beyond brief, "question and response" format situations. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the "participant-as-observer" as one who "enters into the social life of those studied, sometimes assuming an insider role, but often playing the part of a snoop, shadow, or historian" (p. 93). While I did perceive myself to be a "shadow" on many occasions, I strongly desired not to be viewed as a "snoop." I was well aware, however, that there may come times when my presence as a "recorder" might be sensed as intrusive by Sarah or her students. Stacey (1991) writes that, "No matter how welcome, even enjoyable, the fieldworker's presence may appear to 'natives,' fieldwork represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships, a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave. The inequality and potential treacherousness of this relationship is inescapable" (p. 113). I was continually aware of the vulnerable position which Sarah has placed herself within as a "subject" of my research. Because of this, at times over the course of my early days in the classroom, I felt uncomfortable taking notes, particularly when children were misbehaving or Sarah seemed frustrated. On some of these occasions, I did continue to write, but wondered whether or not this caused anxiety for Sarah. On other occasions, I put my pen down, or became an active participant in class events, rather than conspicuously taking notes. Later in the year, Sarah told me that it felt "strange" at first when she realized that I was taking notes, but

that, over time, it seemed more normal and less threatening.

My efforts to participate with Sarah's students, particularly during the early days of my research, were a mixture of what I now consider to be both helps and blunders. When I relied upon Sarah's specific directions, I generally felt more secure about my role, whether it be listening to children read or answering questions as children did seatwork, both tasks which Sarah asked me to do from the very beginning of our work together. On other occasions, although Sarah had not given specific direction, I intervened in ways which I believed would be helpful to Sarah, when she was not available to do so. Examples might be walking a child to the bathroom when Sarah was working with a small group or finding supplies or materials that a child needed, etc. If possible, I asked for Sarah's counsel before attempting any action, considering myself to be a novice and learner, rather than an authority, in the classroom. In some situations, however, to ask for Sarah's advice would have meant interrupting her direct instruction, thus I used my own judgment and later asked Sarah whether or not she would prefer for me to act differently should a similar situation arise in the future.

I recall a situation that arose during my first week of observations which represents an early blunder that I made in my efforts to "help." One of Sarah's students, a child named Donald, had a great deal of difficulty with remaining attentive in situations where he was required to listen. For example, it was common for him to scoot away from the rug area or wander about the classroom when his classmates were listening to a book. One morning, during read-aloud time, he began to venture back toward the puzzle table, at which I was taking notes. When he began to work with the puzzle pieces, and then captured the attention of another child who joined him at the puzzle table, I suggested quietly to both of them, "Listen. Mrs. Rhea is reading right now." When I made this suggestion, Sarah heard it and looked up from her reading to tell me, "It's OK, Mrs. Murrill. They're making a choice." I later realized that my comment to the boys, which was essentially a teacher redirection, was inconsistent with Sarah's move toward student responsibility for their actions, which involved children making choices and accepting the responsibilities and consequences for their decisions. Through this event, I was reminded of my position as learner. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that "it is only through watching, listening, asking questions, formulating hypotheses, and

making blunders that the ethnographer can acquire some sense of the social structure of the setting and begin to understand the culture of the participants" (p. 89). Blunders such as this one were definitely shaping factors in my growing understanding of the culture within Sarah's classroom.

Although my awareness increased through experiences such as the one I've just described, this gain was coupled with concern about Sarah's perceptions of my research. I desired to establish a mutual trust with Sarah, grounded upon qualities of trustworthiness. I have considered a description of trustworthiness compiled by Walker (1994), which states that:

> "Trustworthiness indicates that the research has been conducted fairly and represents as closely as possible the perceptions of the individual who participated in the research process (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz, 1991). To be trustworthy, the research must be 'grounded in ethical principles, about how the data are collected and analyzed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved and how results are communicated' (Ely, et. al., 1991, p. 93)" (p. 40).

I wanted Sarah to know that my intentions were to understand her perceptions as authentically as possible, and that my errors were part of the learning process, not representative of an established perspective which I would continually view her class through. Very late in our work together, Sarah confided to me that she was somewhat stressed that first week by her own belief that I felt her students were poorly behaved. I realize now that I did not take enough time, early on, to communicate my "assumptions and conclusions" toward the process of "checking" them, as Ely, et.al. recommend. On many days, I was sensitive to the brevity of time that Sarah had to reorganize when students were at a special activity and hesitated to talk with her then about my research. As the semester progressed, I found times that I sensed were better for Sarah and would sometimes touch base with her after school or when walking back to the classroom after leaving the children in the lunchroom. These brief times of question, response and affirmation enabled me to communicate to Sarah that I was committed to understanding her perspective. My hope was to work toward, as Lincoln (1996) describes, a "deep sense of trust, caring, heightened awareness, and mutuality" (p. 16) in our relationship.

As my research in Sarah's classroom continued, an additional decision that I

encountered concerned how often I planned to visit, how long each stay would last, and what would be the ultimate duration of the study. Current literature in the field of ethnographic research consistently speaks in support of sustained research over a considerable amount of time. Lincoln (1996) writes that she uses methodological criteria to question her doctoral students who are about to conduct dissertation research, reminding them that, "seeking out multiple constructions of the world by multiple stakeholders has to be marked by serious, sustained searches for, and prolonged engagement with, those stakeholders and their constructions" (p. 7). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) add to this idea, stating that, "Over a sustained period of time, they (ethnographers) must maintain constant interaction with participants" (p. 95). As Sarah and I negotiated both the frequency and duration of my visits, I kept this criterion in mind.

I was also concerned with the necessity to maintain a respect for Sarah's needs. For example, in conversations with Sarah I perceived that she was open and welcoming towards my fieldwork in her class; in addition, she readily agreed when I asked that I might interview her on a variety of occasions, and we were successful in juggling our schedules to find times which suited both of us. I was also interested in sitting in on planning sessions during which Sarah and Kelly collaborated. I sensed, though, that these sessions provided more for Sarah than just the opportunity to organize curricula. Sarah described Kelly to me as not just a colleague, but as a close friend. Even in our earliest interviews, Sarah mentioned that she anticipated talking with and planning with Kelly frequently, that it was *"comforting and exciting both to have Kelly here,"* and that, *"it's just so good to have someone else that understands."* On many occasions, Sarah and Kelly would plan over dinner or before a shopping trip. I felt that my presence within this context would be intrusive. Because of this, my descriptions of the collaborative planning that Sarah and Kelly participated in are based upon their explanations of these planning sessions, rather than on-site fieldnotes during these events.

Thus, my decisions concerning the frequency and duration of research were primarily related to classroom visits and interviews. Collectively, I was able to spend 51 school days with Sarah and her students, of which many were full or nearly full days (See Appendix C for listing of data collection dates and times).

Concerning on-site research, Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that a researcher should spend enough time in the field to "overcome the effects of misinformation, to uncover constructions and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context's culture" (p. 237). In an effort to immerse myself into the classroom culture, I initially decided to visit the classroom on three occasions per week. Generally, this arrangement involved one full day and two half days. This allowed me to be in the classroom on many school days, which I hoped might establish my presence as ordinary to Sarah and her students. As my work progressed, I found that the full days which I spent in the field were more satisfying to me than the half days, because I was better able to perceive how specific events fit within the context of the flow of the day. For this reason, after the Christmas break I rearranged my schedule, and planned to visit on two full school days per week, instead of what I had previously arranged. I followed this pattern through both January and February.

In March, I once again attempted a different plan, this time altering my schedule to include a full week of fieldwork within Sarah's classroom. From Monday, March 3rd through Friday, March 7th, I visited daily, arriving in time for morning bus duty and staying well after school was over. During this week, I was able to chaperone a field trip, attend an all-school faculty meeting, sit in on after school planning, and supervise the children in a variety of situations. Over the course of this week, I began to perceive myself as a member of their community, not as a visitor. In addition, I grew in my understandings of the school context within which Sarah taught, and I developed a clearer awareness of the flow of a school week.

Following this experience, my visits to Sarah's classroom became less frequent, as I moved closer toward analysis of my fieldwork. From mid-March through the end of April, I visited Sarah's classroom one full day per week. During May and June, this decreased to one full day every other week, with the exception of the last week of school. I was present on both June 10 and June 11, the final student-attended days for the school year. I hoped to gain an understanding of the closure which Sarah and her students experienced on these days. In addition, I wanted to spend a little bit of time with Sarah's students before leaving the site permanently.

Interviews and informal meetings with Sarah spanned a slightly broader period of

time, as compared to classroom observations. This work began on June 24, 1996, when I first met with Sarah, Kelly and Rebecca over lunch. Our informal meetings and conversations continued through the summer and into the fall. In addition, I scheduled four more formal interviews with Sarah across the course of the school year, holding our last interview on June 16, 1997. In between these formal interviews, I met with Sarah on a number of occasions during the school lunch period for short debriefings concerning events that had taken place for her since my previous visit. Finally, I held interviews with seven individuals to whom Sarah referred me, as those persons who had influenced or impacted her teaching beliefs and practices in some way (See Appendix D for schedule of audiotaped interviews).

Data Collection Techniques

Throughout the course of this study, I have attempted to engage in a variety of data collection methods. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe this practice in their statement that, "Ethnographers use many kinds of data collection techniques, so that data collected in one way can be used to cross-check the accuracy of data gathered in another way" (p. 48). This has been my aim. I have tried to build what Geertz (1973) refers to as a "thick description" of the culture I've worked within, constructing a multi-layered account which reflects the experiences and understandings of Sarah, her students and others whom Sarah has identified as salient to her practice. Delamont (1992) also speaks to the importance of examining multiple perspectives, stating that, "Observation alone is rarely desirable, and most studies benefit from multiple data collection strategies" (p. 6). In accordance with these recommendations, the data collection techniques which I utilized included interviews with Sarah and others, informal conversations, observational fieldnotes, and collection of artifacts, photographs and documents.

Interviews with Sarah. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz (1991) purport that, "The major purpose of an in-depth ethnographic interview is to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed" (p. 58). At various points across the course of the school year, I scheduled interviews with Sarah, in order to gain a clearer understanding of her perspective about her work in the classroom at each of these points. With the exception of our June 1997 interview, which was held in Sarah's home,

our audiotaped interviews were held in Sarah's classroom. Two were held on teacher work-days, which provided us with an open-ended amount of time for discussion. The remaining interviews were held either after school or during one of Sarah's "breaks" across the course of a school day.

I agree with Goodson (1994) that "all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice" (p. 31). I hoped that through interviewing Sarah on multiple occasions, I might learn more about her personal considerations concerning her beliefs and practices. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) describe qualitative interviewing as "repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words" (p. 77). It was critical for me to invite Sarah to personally describe her perspectives and experiences, rather than to assume them based upon my impressions. Nonetheless, I am aware that the interactive nature of our interviews invited somewhat of a "co-construction" of the teaching ideology we considered. In this sense, the data that I collected from interview discussions was likely more influenced by my own participation than the data which I collected from observing Sarah across her classroom practices.

As an interviewer, I held to a perspective asserted by Cotterill (1992), which states that, "the best way to find out about women's lives is to make interviewing an interactive experience" (p. 594). In this respect, I felt that our interviews were more like conversations than formal question and answer sessions. The design of the interviews aligned with what Kvale (1996) refers to as a semistructured research interview, which he describes as neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. Marshall and Rossman (1989) write about an approach to qualitative interviewing through which the interviewer introduces broad questions and topics and then "respects how the participant frames and structures the responses" (p. 82). I tried to follow this strategy, listening closely for salient topics as described by Sarah and following up her responses with questions which helped me to understand more clearly and fully what she was expressing. For instance, in an August interview when I asked Sarah about her teaching plans, she frequently referred to ways in which she hoped to work jointly with her colleague, Kelly Ainsworth. Because collaboration with Kelly seemed to be salient to

Sarah's work, I constructed further questions about specific things they planned to do jointly, such as planning instructional units and grouping their classes together for inquiry.

I found it interesting that the nature of our interviews changed some over the course of time. In our first two interviews, I found myself preparing several broad interview questions, such as "Tell me about your teaching," and "How have things gone with your students since we last talked?" I hoped that through using broad questions such as these, Sarah might feel free to direct our conversation toward ideas and topics of importance to her. As the year progressed, I sensed that Sarah did not hesitate to set the direction within our interviews of her own accord. On several occasions, she made statements such as, *"There were two things I wanted to tell you about . . ."* and then went on to discuss things she had been considering, such as Mr. Dixon's support or a classroom occurrence she was excited about. In these situations, our conversation centered first upon Sarah's direction, moving toward any broad questions which I had constructed later. I found that I was able to eliminate some of my prestructured questions when this occurred, because the discussion Sarah initiated served my purpose of stimulating conversation about my larger research questions. Questions that I created for our first interview included asking about Sarah's teaching history, her personal beliefs about teaching and learning and her plans for the coming school year. As the year progressed, further interview questions concerned her perceptions about teaching and learning that were taking place in her classroom at that particular time, her teaching ideas and plans from that point forward, updates concerning persons, materials or other factors that were supportive of her work, any constraints that she felt, and her perception of how her efforts were situated within the building context.

As an interviewer, I learned that I could not assume shared understandings between Sarah and myself concerning terminology that she included in her statements. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) caution that "the ethnographer who hears native terms should not assume that they have single, discrete meanings, but rather should explore their various shades of meanings and differing import to members positioned differently within a setting" (p. 120). On one occasion, for example, Sarah explained to me her interest in using "inquiry learning" in her classroom. Because I have heard educators

describe this differently, I asked if she might describe for me her understanding of inquiry learning. Throughout our interviews, I continually attempted to listen and learn from Sarah. Barber (1994) describes a research perspective in which participants become the cultural informants with a setting, and, in fact, the "experts" who can guide the researcher to significant focuses to consider and persons to talk to throughout the course of the study. Following this premise, the issues which Sarah raised in our interviews were significant, in that they informed me concerning directions, concerns and ideas of importance to her, all of which contributed to a more complete understanding of Sarah's beliefs and practices. In addition, Sarah directed me specifically to others whom she believed I might want to interview concerning their connections to her work By guiding me toward both salient issues and persons, Sarah was very much a "cultural informant" throughout this project.

In order to best preserve Sarah's words, I asked her if I might audiotape all of our interviews and later transcribe them. She agreed to this. In my transcriptions, the only language which I altered involved using pseudonyms in place of names and identifying markers within the context. Later in my work, I hired a transcriptionist to assist me in the completion of several audiotapes. This person signed a statement of confidentiality which I constructed (See Appendix E for Statement of Confidentiality). Additionally, all completed transcripts, audiotapes and computer disks were returned to me; no copies were stored by the transcriptionist. Following the construction of each of these transcriptions, I listened to the interview audiotapes and marked any needed corrections on the transcribed copies.

Informal Conversations. In addition to the "semistructured," more lengthy interviews which Sarah provided for me, she and I also engaged in less formal conversations frequently. Delamont (1992) designates between more formal interviews and less formal conversations when she describes the latter as "interviews done while observation is going on...when quick questions are put to informants about what is happening" (p. 109). As my work with Sarah proceeded, these "informal conversations" or "debriefings" occurred weekly, and sometimes daily. I sensed their importance in connection to a purpose noted by Smith (1993), who states that, "in order to understand a setting, it is necessary to seek out how the people themselves in that setting interpret it"

(p. 93).

The design of these informal conversations varied widely. As I became increasingly more aware of the flow of each school day and week, I was better able to gauge when opportunities might arise that would be suitable for brief conversation. Toward this purpose, I also asked Sarah directly what times of the day might be best for her. She generally chose lunch periods, and on occasion selected a special activity period, during which the children were attending music, art, etc. My original plan was to audiotape each of these conversations and later transcribe them. I found, though, that these occasions were subject to a good deal of noise and commotion, due to children in the hallway, other teachers stopping by the classroom, etc., and the first few audiotapes that I obtained were difficult to interpret later. Ultimately, I chose instead to listen closely to Sarah's descriptions and answers to my questions, then to go quickly to my notebook to jot down key ideas that would trigger my memory later as I reconstructed the conversation in a more complete form. At times, I initiated our conversations, and on other occasions Sarah initiated them. Many times, our debriefings were not officially scheduled, but took place unexpectedly when the events of the day raised questions. For example, in one situation, a child's outburst in the hallway preceded Sarah's counsel to him. Because I was not in the hallway when the outburst occurred, but did hear her talking with the child afterwards, Sarah later described for me the entire incident. In other instances, when the daily scheduled was altered, or the activity Sarah had planned was new to me, she would sometimes debrief me as the children were moving from their desks to the rug area or lining up at the doorway. Sarah's efforts to inform me were helpful as I attempted to record the events of each day; her comments continually guided me toward fewer assumptions in my research and more authentic reconstructions of Sarah's perceptions of classroom life.

Classroom Observations and Fieldnote Construction. Given the nature of my research, I found that observation within Sarah's classroom constituted a significant portion of my data collection process. I considered this process to be my opportunity to both observe and experience the "culture" developing amongst Sarah and her students. Geertz (1973) describes culture as "a shared imaginative universe within which members' acts are signs" (p. 13). Lemke (1995) considers culture through a different

lens, purporting that "when all possible actions are equally probable in all contexts, there is no culture" (p. 123). Considering both of these conceptions of culture, my goal as an observer within Sarah's classroom was to examine the acts of class members, hoping that, over time, I might become aware of the actions and reactions which were more probable than others in this particular universe or context. While my specific research focus was aimed toward an exploration of Sarah's actions, I learned that the activities of and statements made by her students were integral to her practices. Thus my observations involved consideration of the classroom culture as a whole, as I realized that Sarah's "practice" was orchestrated within the context of that classroom culture. Considerations of practice and context could not be separated. In agreement with a statement made by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), I determined that "ethnographers must work in settings where behavior occurs naturally; they must go to their participants" (p. 95). The setting for the bulk of my observation was the classroom that Sarah shared with her twelve or thirteen second grade students (the class roster changed at two points during my research).

Throughout my fieldwork in Sarah's classroom, I aimed to maintain the "participant-as-observer" role, as described by Gold (1958). Deconstructing this further, I have read in literature concerning the role of the ethnographic researcher that several positions within the conception of participant-as-observer can be taken. In some studies, researchers have assumed the role of an absorbed observer or "fly on the wall," interacting relatively little with those he/she is observing (Thorne, 1993). In other studies, researchers have been described as participants in the research settings to the point that they run the risk of "going native." This phenomena is described cautiously by Delamont (1992), who suggests that "going native" can effect a researcher's over-identification with persons in the setting to the point that they lose their research outlook. While I was cognizant of this risk, I favored a position taken by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) which holds that "the field researcher can only get close to the lives of those studied by actively participating in their day to day affairs" (p. 2). They further describe the purpose for the participatory emphasis when they explain, "the object of participation is ultimately to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities mean to them" (p. 12). Although Delamont (1992) raised the

caution against participation that leads to "going native," she does assert that a "helping" role in a field setting is a viable position, explaining that this is one role a researcher may need to assume "in order to relate successfully to informants" (p. 138). I viewed my tasks as "assistant teacher" within the parameters of a "helping" role.

Soon after establishing a participant-as-observer stance in Sarah's classroom, I realized that judgments concerning observation were more complex than I had anticipated. Delamont (1992) describes the dilemma of choosing where and when to "look" as "a matter of systematic, principled, reflexive decision-making" (p. 115). I found that my earliest observations were characterized by what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) denote as "casting your net broadly." They advise the beginning ethnographer to follow this method when first venturing into a setting, observing with an eye to writing about a wide range of incidents and interactions, then gradually becoming more specifically focused as fieldwork progresses (p. 29). Delamont (1992) also speaks to this practice, adding that, "looking at and recording everything is, of course, impossible," which precipitates a "good consequence . . . (that) the research has to begin to look selectively" (p. 114).

Given this need, I continually analyzed my fieldwork as a means for informing further visits, seeking to focus my observations more selectively. This was challenging for me, both in terms of observing and recording. During the initial days of my study, I described the setting as fully as I could, noting things like the furnishings within the classroom and items posted on the walls. Later recordings concerning setting focused only on alterations that had occurred, such as the addition of a new chart or the rearrangement of students' desks. In a similar fashion, early, physical descriptions of Sarah and her students were more thorough, while later accounts included only differences that I saw. In recording incidents and interactions, however, I found that my observations were broader throughout the bulk of the study. Over the course of the first few months, I attempted to focus on Sarah's directives, questions and responses to students, as well as their statements and questions. I considered classroom policies and guidelines, such as rules for behavior, rewards and consequences. I also looked closely at the curricula that Sarah was planning and presenting, considering its content, as well as the teaching methods that she used with the children. I did find that my observations

became significantly more focused after I had experienced my full week within Sarah's classroom. At that point, I sensed that my understandings of the daily flow of events, as well as the patterns that characterized Sarah's teaching methods, and the established class policies and guidelines, were more solid. Following that week, my observations were largely directed toward interactions between Sarah and her students, particularly considering each person's "agency" within various situations and contexts. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) describe this type of observation and recording as "active interpretation," rather than passive description. They explain that the fieldnotes which reflect this type of recording can be characterized as action sequences that highlight a character's agency to affect her world, "a character acts within a situation, in response to a condition or to interactions with others in ways that shape future interactions" (p. 72).

Ultimately, my fieldnotes served as records of my perceptions of what took place at a given time, in a given situation. Geertz (1973) describes fieldnotes as "inscriptions" of social life and discourse, explaining that "the ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse, he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can be reconsulted" (p. 19). The fieldnotes which I constructed, particularly as I gained experience and moved toward the end of my study, were specifically aimed toward this purpose.

When I initially began to observe and take notes in Sarah's classroom, I made several general decisions which guided my notetaking practices from that point forward. First, I considered various forms of fieldnotes and which style would best suit my work. Delamont (1992) explains that two forms of fieldnotes, "real time versions" and "out-of-field versions" can be created. In a "real time versions" the notes are taken at the time, while present in the field setting; the "out-of-field version" are constructed after leaving the field, "while the memory is still fresh enough" to make sense of and reconstruct the field events (pp. 52-54). Because my role in Sarah's classroom was participatory in nature, I was not able to write lengthy, descriptive accounts while on site. I was able, however, to "jot" down descriptions, remarks, segments of conversations, and key words which served to jog my memory later when I sat down to construct expanded fieldnotes. Van Maanen (1988) comments on the inadequacy of fieldnotes as they are jotted down on

site, explaining that they are "gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations and conversations that took place in the field" (p. 123). Given this characteristic, I sensed the need to elaborate upon my recordings as soon as possible after leaving the classroom on most occasions. For fieldnote elaboration, I followed one of two processes. For about half of my observation days, I constructed expanded fieldnotes on a word processor shortly after leaving the classroom. When I was unable to follow this process, I revisited the notes that I had taken in the classroom and marked them, highlighting sections of importance to me and adding commentary in the margins. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) write that, "the longer the time between observation and recording, the more troublesome will be the recall and recording of adequately detailed and concrete descriptions" (p. 48). I found this to be true. Fortunately, this was not characteristic of my fieldnote expansion in general. In all instances, both the on-site jottings, which I kept in four wireless notebooks, and the expanded fieldnotes were not examined by anyone except myself. Delamont (1992) purports that this is common practice, stating that most researchers are protective of their fieldnotes. "Few researchers produce their originals, or even discuss what they write down" (p. 54). Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) add that, "fieldnotes seem too revealingly personal, too messy and unfinished to be shown to any audience" (p. ix). Following their recommendations, I chose to maintain my fieldnotes confidentially, preferring instead to share with others a more complete version of my writing which would reflect careful considerations constructed over time.

Curiously, although I attempted to "record as unobtrusively as possible," as Delamont (1992) suggests, there were several occasions on which children commented about my notetaking and asked me questions about what I was doing. Some were impressed by the fact that I could "write without looking," glancing out at the classroom while my hand was still writing. On more than one occasion, a child brought this to Mrs. Rhea's attention. When children asked what I was writing, I told them, "I'm writing about Mrs. Rhea's teaching." Usually, after receiving this response, they appeared to be satisfied. Over time, these questions subsided. Only once did a child pick up my notebook while I was away from my table; Sarah saw him with it and asked him to give it to her. I made a general practice of closing the notebook and/or putting it away in my totebag when I stopped notetaking. On a few occasions, teachers within the building

stopped by Sarah's classroom to borrow or return materials, ask her a question, or even to observe her teaching. Twice I was asked about my role within the classroom, and I explained my research focus. Although I was present across the building as a whole in the context of walking the children to and from special classes, lunch or the play area outside, it was not until my full week that many of the teachers in the building were alerted to my purpose. During the faculty meeting which I attended that week, Mr. Dixon asked Sarah to introduce me, and she explained to the group that I was studying her teaching, adding that I was working with her students as well. Following that point, no one questioned me about my presence.

A final consideration that I came across as an observer and notetaker was that of separating my own analytical comments from the descriptive fieldnotes which I was producing in elaborated form. Initially, I hoped to keep a personal journal that would serve as a space for me to record my own insights, hunches, frustrations and breakthroughs. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) describe this type of journal as an "ongoing reflection-on-action," going on to say that as kept over time, the journal can "begin to provide insight into personal knowledge when you reread entries over several days and weeks. What connecting threads are apparent over time? Are there events or ideas that recur?" (pp. 34-35) Over time, however, I found that it made more sense for me to integrate my analytic thoughts within the fieldnotes, to connect my ideas directly with inscriptions of the events and interactions which prompted them. In reviewing the literature, I found that methodologists are divided concerning this practice, some suggesting that the ethnographer's personal interpretations and hunches be incorporated directly into the fieldnotes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995), and others recommending that the personal journal be kept separately (Sanjek, 1990; Hogan, 1988).   I made the decision to integrate the two, but also to attempt to maintain separate entities for the distinct purposes by enclosing my analytic comments in parentheses and typing them with an italic font. My ultimate purpose was to follow a recommendation made by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), who suggest, "While reading documents, making fieldnotes, or transcribing audio or videotapes, promising theoretical ideas often arise. It is important to make note of these because they may prove useful when analyzing . . . the data" (p. 164).

Collection of Documents, Artifacts and Photographs. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) assert that an additional form of research that, in essence, serves as a record of social interactions, is the collection of documents. As I worked in Sarah's classroom, I was able to obtain a wide range of materials that were connected, in some sense, to her work as a teacher. This collection included documents such as professional articles which the principal distributed to the faculty, a weekly class schedule that Sarah constructed, copies of Sarah's performance evaluations, a letter which Sarah addressed to the school's "site-based" committee, and the second grade Standards of Learning (1995) published by the state. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) classify documents into categories determined, in part, by intended audience. For example, the professional articles and Standards of Learning might be considered "published sources," while the weekly class schedule would be referred to as a "public document inside the institution," and the performance evaluations and personal letter would be designated "private documents." Because the latter documents were not intended for public use, they became accessible to me solely because Sarah asked if I might like to review them. Delamont (1992) asserts that collected documents within all of these categories can inform a researcher, if she or he remembers that, like fieldnotes or interviews, "all written records are socially produced . . . written in a social context, with some audience in mind, even if the audience is only the author (p. 105)." I have attempted to examine the documents I collected in light of the message(s) they send, and toward whom these messages were directed.

In addition to these items, I asked Sarah if she might construct two documents for my purposes, consistent with Hammersley and Atkinson's category, "documents that the researcher has asked for." These included an autobiographical "map" of her work as a teacher, which allowed me to perceive more specifically the "reconstruction and telling of one's past" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 37). My interest was to learn more about the development of Sarah's teaching beliefs and practices over the course of time and place. Second, Sarah constructed for me a contextual map, in which she portrayed her present work, as placed within her school building community, and within extended networks of support that she has become a part of. My hope was to gain an understanding of Sarah's perceptions of the context within which she taught and to

consider the ways in which her teaching community functioned, socially, organizationally, and to some degree, ideologically. I was also curious about extended support networks with whom Sarah identified herself, agreeing with Beyer (1996) that "building bridges of support can encourage and support the sort of risk taking that is required of teachers" (p. 20). As my research evolved, Sarah and I talked about those persons who have supported and continue to support her teaching beliefs and practices; the maps which she constructed provided me with a chronological and spatial framework within which to place these persons.

In conjunction with my role as an assisting teacher in Sarah's classroom, I also received a variety of unsolicited classroom "artifacts," all presented to me by the children in the classroom. These included letters they had written to me, pictures they had drawn, Valentine cards, candy and cookies, jewelry they had made, and several other items. These artifacts were significant, in that they signaled acceptance and trust. To reciprocate, I bought bookmarks and made cookies for the children at Christmas, and gave them cards and candy for Valentine's Day. Throughout the year, I also corresponded back and forth with students via both the school's official "mail system," through which members of the Eastside community could send and receive leters, and also the class message board, on which members of Sarah's classroom could post notes for others. Several of the letters and notes that I received were constructed by students who had just begun to read during the fall of second grade, some whom had been characterized as unsuccessful readers and writers by their first grade teachers. It was significant to me that these students regularly used both the mail system and the message board. Witnessing their enthusiasm reminded me of a classroom situation described by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) in which "many were 'turned on' to writing in ways which surprised themselves . . . this writing was their own, generated by them" (p. 314).

Finally, Sarah left notes for me on the message board or at my table on several occasions. These ranged widely. I received thank you cards, a note asking if I'd like to look at her performance evaluation, and a note explaining that her request to be assigned as a third grade teacher, for the same group of students, had been approved. One morning she also left on my table an envelope containing a pile of slips returned by her students' parents expressing their desires to let their children remain in Sarah's classroom

for the additional work.. In each of these instances, the materials that Sarah left for me informed my understanding of her work in the classroom at that point in the school year.

Another form of data collection, which, like document acquisition, can serve as a recording of social interaction, is the use of photographs. I photographed spaces and items within Sarah's classroom for three purposes. First, I hoped to capture a sense of the spaces within which class members interacted. In this regard, I took pictures of the "rug area," desk arrangements, various "centers," materials hung on the wall, etc. Second, I wanted to photograph materials prepared by Sarah and her students which were representative of classroom projects and curricular focuses. Examples of items I photographed included inquiry group projects, poems and stories that class members collaborated on, and weekly spelling lists compiled by both Sarah and her students. Finally, I took pictures of items around the classroom which were connected in some sense to the class policies and ways of treating one another that Sarah encouraged. I photographed the four class "rules" displayed on the board, along with the "point chart," the "team cooperation chart," the bulletin board which identified class helpers, and various posters which focused on qualities such as team work and valuing others. In order to maintain anonymity, I was careful not to photograph Sarah or her students for research purposes. Thus, my pictures display only materials and spaces.

Interviews with Others. Lemke (1995) writes that "all meanings are made within communities," and that "the analysis of meaning should not be separated from the social, historical, cultural and political dimensions of these communities" (p. 9). Based upon this premise, I sought to understand Sarah and her work as situated amongst the communities she was part of. Thus, my data collection included interviewing Mr. Dixon, the building principal at Eastside, along with Kelly Ainsworth, Sarah's colleague and friend. Acting as my "cultural informant," Sarah identified both of these individuals as persons within the building who were supportive of her teaching. In addition, she suggested that I interview five others whom she designated as having had impact upon her teaching beliefs and practices over the course of time. This group included her mother, who is also an educator, two university professors who teach in the area of curriculum and instruction, and two women whose children had been in Sarah's classes at different points, both of whom also have backgrounds in education. I was able to

conduct interviews which ranged from 30 to 90 minutes with all of these individuals.

My interview with Mr. Dixon focused upon not only his support of Sarah's teaching, but also his perceptions of the school community as a whole. Smith (1993) writes that, "the organizational design of a school sets a context for the education that students receive and for the climate in which teachers teach" (p. 33). When meeting with Mr. Dixon, I asked him to describe for me the Eastside School community, its teachers and students, and dynamics characteristic of the work and interactions amongst community members. His responses confirmed a statement made by Weiler (1988), who wrote that schools are not isolated from the dynamics of a wider society, but that contradictions and tensions can exist within them, although Mr. Dixon framed this understanding by describing it within a context of slow, steady growth. Throughout our conversation, as well as across my interactions with him over the course of the school year, I was consistently impressed by his professional demeanor and by the respect he displayed when talking about both his staff and their students. Smith (1993) asserts that "ultimately it takes ethical, genuine and fair support from the top leadership in order for school personnel to carry out good work that is primarily for the benefit of students" (p. 29). Weiler (1988) supports this assertion by providing an example of a school research site where "the administrative attitude provided an unusually supportive working environment" (p. 68). Given comments made by Sarah and other teachers at Eastside, along with my own observations throughout the year, I perceived the fair support that Mr. Dixon provided for his staff members to be exemplary. During our conversation, I also asked him to describe his own background in education, as well as his core beliefs about teaching and learning, and directions that he hoped the Eastside community might move towards as a body.

When I met with Kelly Ainsworth, as well as the five others whom Sarah identified as salient to her beliefs and practices, the interview questions focused less upon the specific building context at Eastside and more upon their work relationships with Sarah, both historically and at present. I asked each individual to describe their own backgrounds and core beliefs about teaching and learning, and then to explain the context within which they got to know Sarah and the roles and situations within which they interacted and continue to interact with her. Finally, I asked if they could describe for me

ways in which they may have influenced or impacted Sarah's beliefs and practices, and vice versa, and also to explain their perceptions of Sarah's work as a teacher. Throughout these interviews, it was clear to me that Sarah has placed herself within longstanding networks of support, which have functioned as a catalyst for her across the course of time, in her efforts to transform her beliefs about teaching into real practices. Stevenson and Carr (1993) write of the value of collaborative, supportive interactions with others who share their interests when they describe their own interactions with fellow educators: "We drew strength from each other's ideas, and we got to know and rely on each other better through our shared commitment. But it has been the spirit of personal and professional responsibility that has been most fulfilling. We acted together in faith that we could transcend conventional practice in legitimate, worthwhile ways for our students" (pp. 188-189). Over the course of her teaching history, each of these fellow educators has in some sense shared common ideas and commitments with Sarah, and these ties have supported and strengthened her work with her students.

When arranging interviews with these persons, I followed several suggestions recommended by scholars in qualitative research. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) advise that for many individuals, "Interviewing them on their own territory *is* the best strategy since it allows them to relax much more than they would in either a university office or a public place like a restaurant" (p. 125). In accordance with this recommendation, these interviews were conducted within the participant's space. Three interviews were held in elementary school buildings, one was held in a woman's home, and two were held in university professors' offices. The final person I interviewed was Sarah's mother, who lives out of state. Because it was not possible for me to interview her "face-to-face," as recommended by Briggs (1986), we arranged to hold our interview over the phone while she was at home, using recording equipment which served this purpose.

An additional consideration was the issue of providing interview questions for the participants in advance. One person requested this specifically, and another seemed curious about the direction of the interview, so I asked if she might like a copy of the questions and she said that she would. In these cases, I mailed and faxed the questions right away. With the other individuals, after briefly describing the nature of the questions

over the phone, no such requests were made. I did ask that interview participants sign "Informed Consent" statements, and all were willing to do so (see Appendix B).

The design of each interview was similar to the approach which I utilized with Sarah, following a semistructured model. I attempted, as I had with Sarah, to introduce the broad questions I had preconstructed, and then to listen carefully to the individual, asking for clarification or additional information when I sensed a need to do so. I found that the dynamics between myself and several of these individuals were less interactive than in my interviews with Sarah, perhaps because we did not know each other outside of the interview context. With one person, however, our interview was extremely interactive. This was both surprising and challenging for me, in that I found it difficult to maintain a focus upon the participants' relationship and work with Sarah across the course of the interview. Delamont (1992), when writing about qualitative interviewing, asserts that, "most people like to tell stories" (p. 111). This particular interview was characterized by a collection of colorful stories and descriptions, some pertinent to my research interests and others less so, but nonetheless interesting. When I later analyzed this particular audiotape, I focused largely upon the material that was relevant to my work.

Each of the interviews that I held with these individuals was audiotaped, based upon the person's agreement with my request to do so. As with Sarah's interviews, I transcribed some of these tapes, while paying for the assistance of a transcriptionist for others.   As mentioned, the secretary who completed the transcriptions signed a statement of confidentiality and returned all materials to me upon completion of her work. In addition, I later listened to each tape and hand corrected each transcription that she prepared to insure accuracy.

Analysis and Writing

Ongoing Analysis. Although I did not begin to systematically or formally analyze data until May 1997, I engaged in informal analysis of data across the course of my fieldwork through the construction of both expanded fieldnotes and analytic memos. The analyses that emerged from these practices proved to be useful to me both during and after the fieldwork phase of the study.

As I regularly retyped my fieldnotes, I incorporated not only descriptions of settings, people, incidents and conversations that I witnessed, but also analytical comments and questions that arose as I reconsidered these descriptions. To ensure that my analytical comments would stand out from descriptive segments, I typed them with an italic font. In one instance, I made this type of comment following a fieldnote description of an incident during which Sarah told the class that she liked a child's idea and explained why she liked it. I wrote, *"The above is interesting and important. She was publicly acknowledging that the idea to do this came from Jonathan and that she wanted to put his idea into practice."* On another occasion, after describing how Sarah responded to a student who wandered away from the class group, I made an analytical comment that connected the incident under consideration with earlier events that I had witnessed: *"Interesting that Sarah's way of handling Chip's getting up and wandering was so different from her way of handling Donald or Alton. Maybe because her expectations of him are different?"* I frequently found myself asking questions of the fieldnotes and transcripts that I was composing. In a sense, the questions and considerations that emerged from this process guided subsequent fieldwork. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) recommend that a researcher consider such questions as: "'Where should I observe next?' or 'What questions should I ask to follow up on this event?'" (p. 103). As they suggest, I found that my observations and interview questions were sometimes guided by questions and considerations that emerged from fieldnote analysis.

In addition to analytical comments within my fieldnotes, I constructed what Delamont (1992) refers to as "analytic memos" (p. 151). She describes these memos as "short notes to yourself and your supervisor in which you review *what* you are doing, *why* you are doing it, *where* you are going next, etc." (p. 151). The analytic memos that I constructed were frequently written in the form of "progress reports" that I prepared before meetings with my advisor. Creating these memos provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my fieldwork and develop what Wolcott (1992) refers to as "little theories" or "hunches" about Sarah's work with her children (p. 8). Throughout the fall and winter months of the school year, I felt that my analyses reflected more questions than identification of patterns. I sensed a shift in my analytical reports, however, following the full week that I spent in Sarah's classroom, March 3-7, 1997. In a March

75

10th progress report to my advisor, I wrote, "I have observed Sarah's efforts toward encouraging children to: 1) actively participate in class decision making and learning, 2) take responsibility for their own choices and actions, and 3) see themselves as valuable people - who have something to contribute." This analysis was significant because it helped me to identify core themes which I later focused on as I more formally analyzed the data.

Rereading and Open Coding. By May 1997, I had begun to decrease the frequency of my visits to Sarah's classroom, to enable me to spend large amounts of time in systematic analysis of the data. As I began this process, I followed a recommendation made by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) who state that, "writing fieldnotes gives way to *reading* them: the ethnographer reads through all fieldnotes as a complete corpus, taking in the entire record of the field experience as it has evolved over time" (p. 142). Delamont (1992) also writes about this process, describing a process by which a researcher reads and rereads her fieldnotes and, as she does so, draws out both "recurrent patterns and instances that run contrary to those patterns" (p. 150).

Because of the volume of fieldnotes which I had accumulated, I decided to read through them in chronological two month segments. Even using this procedure, it often took me several days to read just one of these segments. As I read, I attempted to accomplish what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) refer to as "open coding." They explain, "In open coding, the ethnographer reads fieldnotes line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (p. 143). For me, the open coding procedure involved physically marking sets of my fieldnotes with colored markers. Following a recommendation made by Delamont (1992), I did not mark on my original fieldnotes, but instead, did my coding on copied sets. Delamont explains, "Before beginning coding it is very sensible to have back-up copy of everything; if the coding goes wrong, then it is tragic if the data are destroyed or damaged by the erroneous coding" (p. 154). The markings that I made included naming identifying ideas or "themes" in the margins that I believed were represented in the data, highlighting extracts that corresponded with those themes, and numbering each extract that was highlighted.

Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) explain that open coding "is a way of opening

76

up avenues of inquiry . . . a way to name, distinguish and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations" (p. 151). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) add that open codes "are organizing principles that are not set in stone. They are our own creations, in that we identify and select them ourselves. They are tools to think with. They can be expanded, changed or scrapped altogether as our ideas develop through repeated interactions with the data. Starting to create categories is a way of beginning to read and think about the data in a systematic and organized way" (p. 32). As these descriptions suggest, the codes which I assigned to data were initially numerous and wide-ranging. For example, on a single day in November, I constructed the following "codes" for the data reflective of that day: student choice, students applauding one another's efforts, working out rules for themselves, class responsibilities, Sarah's support of student suggestions, Mr. Dixon's intervention with a child, student participation in academic learning, student behavior in the cafeteria, shifting attitudes for three children, children acting out during reading time, and students making up work that they chose not to complete at an earlier point.

Although my progress through reading and coding seemed slow, I persisted in the time-consuming pattern that Delamont (1992) describes as "indexing and coding your data *densely*: do not try to summarize them under just a few themes. Generate as many codes as you can; be 'wild' if you can" (p. 151). As I worked through the open coding phase of my analysis, my goal was to code broadly, realizing that I could organize my codes into categories and sub-categories at a later point. I viewed my coding as a first step in the direction of systematic analysis and interpretation, believing, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, that codes represent a link between raw data and the researcher's theoretical concepts.

Constructing Analytic Indexes and Focused Coding. After open coding was completed, I proceeded toward the development of what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) refer to as an "analytic index." I initially developed chronological indexes that listed the codings for each date that I had obtained data for. Using these indexes as guides, I later sorted my codings into categories and sub-categories that I believed stood out as recurring patterns and themes across the data. In addition, I incorporated into these categories codings that appeared to contradict the categorical patterns that I had

identified.

My initial efforts to develop these categories leaned, at least to some extent, toward a "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach for data analysis. Glaser and Strauss explain that, "Grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (p. 5). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) expand on this in their description: "The grounded theory approach is a method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses and propositions directly from data, rather than from a priori assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks" (p. 126). These definitions suggest that grounded theory grows directly out of the data collected, with little or no shaping from external sources or frameworks. I would argue, however, that my theoretical constructions could not be separated from the interpretive and conceptual ideas which I brought into data collection and analysis, based upon my own beliefs, interests and questions, particularly concerning critical pedagogy and democratic educational practices. Thus, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) assert:

> "Theory only *seems* to jump out of the data and hit the researcher in the face; this flash of insight occurs only because of the researcher's prior analytic commitments built into the notes, the theoretical concerns and commitments she brings to the reading, and the connections made with other 'similar events' observed and written about. Thus, it is more accurate to say that the ethnographer creates rather than discovers theory" (p. 167).

Following this line of thought, I am well aware that my "creation" of categories and sub-categories was deeply influenced by my interests and background. Ultimately, the primary categories which I identified included: 1) foundations that democratic community was built upon, including relationship, belief and expectation; 2) frameworks that supported an evolution toward democratic community, including construction of classroom guidelines and supportive systems; 3) opportunities for students to participate as community members, including possibilities such as decision making, collaboration and inquiry based learning; and 4) sources of support for Sarah's work, including her students, her building principal and other individuals. For me, these categories represented the activity "systems" which had become apparent over the course of my fieldwork and analysis.

As these categories emerged, I proceeded to engage in what Emerson, Fretz and

Shaw (1995) refer to as "focused coding," a process through which "the fieldworker subjects fieldnotes to a fine-grained, line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as of particular interest. Here, the ethnographer uses a smaller set of promising ideas and categories to provide the major topic and themes for the final ethnography" (p. 143). I worked through this phase of analysis by extracting from my fieldnotes specific examples that either supported or contradicted a selected categorical theme. For each selected fieldnote excerpt, I constructed an index card. Following this procedure, I revisited interview transcriptions and selected quotations which corresponded with the fieldnote accounts which I had selected. Finally, I sought out literature related to each of the themes that I had identified and processed through these sources over the course of several months. My advisor was helpful in guiding me toward relevant literature, and the works that I read often led me to further sources. As I worked through these materials, I created additional index cards, citing quotations and ideas within the readings that related to my categorical themes. As I proceeded to do this, my readings often raised interesting questions which I had not yet considered. As this occurred, I frequently returned to my data for the purpose of examining these added lines of thoughts. Subsequently, although my primary categories were not altered, I found that I began to perceive these themes from multiple angles, some of which I had not originally envisioned. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe a process referred to as "abductive reasoning," which reflects an analytical process similar to the one I followed. They write:

> "Abductive reasoning or inference implies that we start from the particular. We identify a particular phenomenon . . . We then try to account for that phenomenon by relating it to broader concepts. We do so by inspecting our own experience, our stock of knowledge of similar, comparable phenomena, and the equivalent stock of ideas that can be included from within our disciplines (including theories and frameworks) and neighboring fields. In other words, abductive inferences seek to go beyond the data themselves, to locate them in explanatory or interpretive frameworks. The researcher is not content to try to slot them into existing ideas, for the search includes new, surprising or anomalous observations. On the other hand, such strange phenomena are not used only to disconfirm existing theories: They are used to come up with new configurations of ideas. There is thus a repeated interaction among existing ideas, former findings and observations, new observations, and new ideas" (p. 156).

In the sense that Coffey and Atkinson describe, I began to "contextualize my analysis within a broader analytical framework" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 34). As I juxtaposed and organized the approximately 675 index cards that I had constructed, I was laying the groundwork upon which I created outlines for the chapters in my project which focus on the four selected primary themes.

Representing My Work Through Writing. As I approached the writing phase of this project, I became increasingly anxious about the task before me. My hope was to create what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) call a "plausible account - one that rings true . . . It is an account of which one might say, 'I can see that happening'" (p. 8). I experienced a heavy sense of responsibility as I contemplated that my writing would represent the lived experiences of other people. My hope was to describe Sarah's work with her students as honestly and thoughtfully as I could, while realizing that my own perspective as a researcher would distinctly influence my writings. Wolcott (1994) advises qualitative researchers to consider that:

> "Description . . . is at the heart of qualitative inquiry. If we could just get the description right - which we never quite do - ours would be the noblest of scientific achievements . . . Firsthand description is not the only basis on which provocative analysis and interpretation may be founded, but whenever it is the basis we claim, it is worthy of our painstakingly thorough and adequately comprehensive efforts to try to get things right, in spite of the impossibility of ever fully succeeding" (pp. 55-56).

As I considered how I might "try to get things right" in representing Sarah's work to others who might read about it, I determined that I needed to provide a contextualized account or "story" of the second grade school year to precede my four thematic chapters. My decision to develop this story was heavily influenced by my reading of McLaren's (1989) text, Life in Schools. The early chapters in McLaren's book were presented as dated accounts of his work with children across the course of a three year period. Later in the book, he included closing chapters that connected the dated accounts with theoretical constructs. I was also impressed by Vivian Gussin Paley's work, Kwanzaa and Me (1995), which was written as a "story" of what she learned as she sought to find out what it meant for the children in her class to "belong, *really* belong, to a school culture." Within her story, Paley included conversations, descriptions of her students and

excerpts of story episodes that she created with her class, interwoven with her own reflections on what she discovered over the course of a school year. As I read both McLaren's and Paley's texts, I was drawn into the experiences that they portrayed, and I sensed that my understandings of the analyses and interpretations that these authors presented were enhanced by specific recollections of the children and events that they had depicted. I hoped that my construction of Sarah's story might accomplish a similar purpose, providing readers with an opportunity to vicariously experience life within her classroom (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

The development of chapter three, "A Story of A School Year," was a long and painstaking process. I revisited the chronological indexes which I had constructed for both fieldnotes and interview transcriptions and began to selectively consider incidents and interactions that might represent the evolution of the school year. As I wrote, I faced what Alvermann, O'Brien and Dillon (1996) refer to as "the Catch-22 of trying to write in a manner that is both interesting and credible" (p. 117). To address this dilemma, I tried to include "stories that stay close to and are highly saturated with bits and pieces of fieldnotes" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p. 174). In addition, I chose to refer to accounts of others who have written about classroom experiences, including the stories of teachers such as Paley, McLaren and Ayers. Several of the accounts which I referred to were works that Sarah had pointed out to me as having influenced her work. Other accounts I considered were works I had come across on my own. My purpose for incorporating references from these works was not to support or argue in favor of Sarah's practices, but rather to show that the beliefs and actions exemplified by Sarah are paralleled by the work of others. I sensed an intersubjectivity amongst many of the teacher stories I referred to. Although these authors spoke from their own unique teaching contexts, many of the beliefs they wrote of, activities they mentioned, tensions they described and dilemmas they raised were interwoven with parallel strands of thought. These works provided personalized accounts of many of the theoretical issues raised by educational scholars such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene and Ira Shor.

Although connections to the experiences of others, as well as my own reflections, are embedded within "A Story of A School Year," this chapter is much less analytically

constructed than the four chapters that follow it, which were created through the abductive reasoning approach that I have previously described. I sought to construct this work as a whole in what Satre refers to as "successive or multiple layers of meaning," (p. 131), moving from a descriptive account in chapter three, toward more analytical considerations of activity systems in chapters four through seven, and finally, a concluding chapter that is characterized by personal interpretation. Concerning this final chapter, I identify with a description of interpretive writing asserted by Wolcott (1994), "(This writing) represents my efforts to extend beyond the boundaries of a particular case to find broader application or meaning.   These are my answers, tentative but not timid, to the nagging question faced by everyone who conducts research in the qualitative/descriptive or, for that matter, any other mode: 'So what?'" (p. 256). Interestingly, I found that after constructing chapter eight, it was essential for me to rewrite chapter one, in order to better introduce the work as a whole. Becker (1986) writes, "You usually find out, by the time you get to the end of your draft, what you have in mind. Your last paragraph reveals to you what the introduction ought to contain" (p. 55). As I completed my draft of the cumulative text, I decided not only to rewrite chapter one, but also to edit each additional chapter, as Becker advises, "making minor changes . . . (that) your new-found focus required" (p. 55).

Writing Conventions. Additional considerations across my writing involved the use of conventions. Because I frequently incorporated Sarah's direct quotations within the text and wanted to clearly distinguish her statements, I chose to italicize them. In addition, I sought to position Sarah's quotations within the text in direct correspondence with my discussions of the events and interactions that she was describing or referring to. In instances where her statements were extrapolated from other contexts, I mentioned this and made reference to the specific interview during which her statements originated.

Another conventional issue that I considered was that of editing direct quotations made by any individual whom I would represent. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) write that when editing excerpts, ethnographers should consider a number of general criteria, including readability, comprehensibility and anonymity of informants.

Concerning readability, these authors recommend that the writer "should take particular care to revise unclear sentences and to correct confusing tense shifts in

portions" (p. 193). They caution, however, that the author should be conservative when editing direct quotations, "carefully balancing the reader's need for clarity against a commitment to providing an accurate rendering of peoples' actual use of words" (p. 193). Following this recommendation, I attempted to make only minor editorial changes within quotations, solely for the purpose of maintaining the clarity of the quote. I did not knowingly revise or delete anything that would alter the meanings presented by the speaker.

In a similar sense, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) describe the need to make excerpts comprehensible to readers by "orienting the reader to the excerpt" or "embedding a brief explanation in brackets within the text" (p. 194). The following example represents an attempt to following this guideline. Of a conversation with Kelly, Sarah explained, *"We went from talking about this year, to talking about John* (Dixon)*, to talking about next year . . ."* In instances such as this one where I added words or phrases to support comprehensibility, I distinguished these additions by using a standard font and placing the added word(s) within parentheses.

Finally, because I had assured each participant that their identities would not be divulged within my writing, I edited quotations by substituting pseudonyms for actual names of persons, places and other identifying markers.

Validity

Lincoln (1996) writes that, "many of the proposed and emerging standards for quality in interpretive social science are also standards for ethics," (p. 23). Her assertion reminds me of Delamont's (1992) challenge to a qualitative researcher, "It is important to be scrupulously honest. There is always a temptation to ignore the incidents or comments which do not support the general argument that is developing" (p. 160). Both of these statements speak to the need to represent the lived experiences of others in a trustworthy manner. Alvermann, O'Brien and Dillon (1996) refer to this issue as a *"crisis of representation,"* which is accompanied by a *"crisis of legitimation*, which involves challenges to many of the criteria (e.g., credibility, comprehensiveness and coherence) that qualitative researchers use in evaluating the trustworthiness of their own writing and that of others" (p. 117).

As I have emphasized, I am well aware that although my writing is both subjective and biased by my personal background and interests, I still hold responsibility for preparing my work as credibly as I possibly can. Guba and Lincoln (1989) list several recommended practices that support the credibility of qualitative work. These practices include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, progressive subjectivity, peer debriefings and member checks (p. 238).

I attempted to meet the criterion, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, by spreading my fieldwork out over the course of a school year and also by visiting to observe in Sarah's classroom on 51 occasions. In relation to the issue of progressive subjectivity, I tried to "cast my net broadly" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995) and as objectively as humanly possible in the early months of my fieldwork, attempting to "funnel" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) my focus more narrowly over the course of time.

The peer debriefings that I engaged in were frequently held with Sarah, particularly during occasional free moments across the course of a school day, while the students attended special area classes or ate lunch. These regular debriefings allowed Sarah an open ended means to inform me of daily occurrences, her thoughts about the progression of a day or redirections she was considering within her teaching. In addition, particularly once I entered the writing phase of the work, I telephoned Sarah on several occasions to verify the accuracy of information. On occasion, I also met with or phoned Kelly Ainsworth to touch base concerning her work with Sarah. In addition, I met regularly with my advisor to discuss my developing perceptions across the course of my fieldwork. These conversations helped me in a sense described by Van Manen (1990) who suggests that collaborative discussions on themes under study are helpful in generating insights and understandings.

I sought Sarah's assistance in relation to a "member check," as well, asking if she would be willing to read and provide feedback for chapter three, "A Story of A School Year." My hope was that she might be able to point out any depictions that she believed to be either inaccurate or misinterpreted. Cotterill (1992) describes the sense of responsibility that a researcher can feel when portraying another person's experiences: "The final shift of power between researcher and respondent is balanced in favor of the

researcher, for it is she who eventually walks away. When the researcher leaves the field and begins to work on the final account, the responsibility for how the data is analyzed and interpreted is entirely her own . . . the responsibility for presenting (the respondents') realities is a heavy one" (p. 201). Although I was able, as Cotterill suggests, to "walk away" from Sarah's classroom, I anxiously wondered how Sarah would respond to my depiction of her story. I was relieved when she responded enthusiastically to the chapter and suggested only minor corrections to the text. Although I did not ask Sarah to read and respond to each of the analytical chapters, we did discuss the themes that I had selected as frameworks for these chapters.

In addition to the criterion for credibility that Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest, several scholars assert that triangulation can be used to strengthen the validity of qualitative data (Delamont, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Swanson, 1992; Deegan, 1991). Delamont (1992) defines triangulation as, "having two or more 'fixed' or 'sightings' of a finding from different angles" (p. 159). She adds that a form of triangulation referred to as "between method triangulation" involves "getting data on something with more than one method" (p. 159). The data collection processes I used involved interviews with both Sarah and others, classroom observations, and the collection of documents and photographs that related to Sarah's work with her children. Throughout analysis and writing, I continually juxtaposed the data I had gathered from these sources, particularly observational fieldnotes and interview transcriptions, in order to consider data from various perspectives. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that "triangulation prevents the investigator from accepting too readily the validity of initial impressions; it enhances the scope, density and clarity of constructs developed during the course of the investigation" (in LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p. 48).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the text I have created and interpretations I have presented within this text are not intended to serve as generalizations, but rather, "richly detailed narratives of personal experiences" (Denzin, 1992, p. 510). My hope has been to honestly and thoughtfully represent the experiences of this particular teacher within this particular classroom with these children at this time, impacted by the specific contexts which she is a part of. In this sense, this story is a very personal and individual one. For those who may read it, my hope is that it might provide

food for thoughtful consideration, especially for those readers who may be considering what it means to nurture a sense of democratic community within their own classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE

A STORY OF A SCHOOL YEAR

Ayers (1993) writes that, "Teachers know *one* story of what's going on, but not the *only* story nor even the 'true story'" (p. 16). He goes on to describe true stories as "multitudinous," given that each student in a class knows her or his own true story. "Kids are active interpreters of classroom reality and their interpretations are only sometimes synonymous with their teacher's interpretations" (p. 16). My story of the 1996-97 school year within Sarah's classroom is, then, one story of many. In it, I have crafted an account of the events and interactions that were lived out by Sarah and her students, framed through Sarah's descriptions and my own observations. I have listened to Sarah tell *her* stories about the school year, hoping that her tellings might allow me to better understand what she believes, feels and does. Although I was not able to formally interview Sarah's thirteen second grade children, I did observe and converse with them across many school days, trying to gain glimpses into their experiences as students. Their stories, each distinct, have informed my perceptions, as well as the construction of this story of Sarah's school year.

August 1996: Directions

> *"'Teach in an inner-city school! You're completely crazy,' a friend warned me" (McLaren, 1989, p. 26).*

Sarah and I met for our first audio-taped interview less than two weeks before the school year began. We sat near the front blackboard in her classroom, in student desks which were already arranged in groups across the floor space. The walls were mostly bare, with the exception of a few posters. Boxes and crates, some partially unpacked and others still full, sat around the room. It was clear that Sarah was moving in. The rug area, in front of the huge back window, however, looked ready and inviting. Shelves and crates along its perimeter displayed a good-sized collection of books, and a rocking chair angled toward the thick, blue area rug from another corner. Potted plants and posters

gave the area a homey appearance. Although we didn't sit there that day, I felt most attracted to that space in Sarah's room (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. The "rug area" in the back corner of Sarah's classroom.

Through our conversation that morning, I was hoping to learn more about Sarah, to ask about her background, her beliefs about teaching, learning and children, and her ideas for the year ahead. Sarah provided me with in-depth responses to all of my inquiries. I learned that she had attended two colleges as an undergraduate, first a *"tiny, tiny college"* near home that had historically been a teacher's college, and then, for her final two years, a large state university, where she would later pursue her graduate work. After graduating, Sarah took a teaching position in Valley City Schools, where she had taught for fifteen of her seventeen years as an educator, to date. She told me that friends asked why she didn't apply to teach in the county schools instead, but explained that teaching in the city schools was her preference. *"I think I was one of those people that felt that inner city kids needed really good teachers. Certainly all children need good teachers, but just because they're not wealthy or live in certain areas does not mean they don't need wonderful teachers."* Over time I realized that when Sarah stated that *"all children need good teachers,"* it reflected her awareness that many children who lacked material privileges were not the ones that "good teachers" often wanted to work with.

Sarah emphasized to me time and again that she genuinely wanted to work with these children. This was not a burden; it was a choice. She went on to say that her preference has only been confirmed over time, explaining,

> *"I think there are some wonderful things about the county schools, but for me, I am just more excited about the city. I think the city is a little more dynamic. It seems like we have a little more freedom to do things, to be a little more student directed. Over all, I've found the parents and the kids to be very open and welcoming in the city. And I like the diversity in the city. I like learning from the kids and them from each other."*

Twelve of Sarah's years in Valley City Schools were spent in two elementary buildings, Parkside and Edgeview, where she taught in the TAG program, "a citywide optional program designed for academically talented students, grades 3-5" (Glossary of Educational Terms, 1996, p. 40). Sarah had, in fact, been part of the initial team which developed the curriculum for the TAG program at its inception. Having visited several TAG classrooms across Valley City, I was aware of its reputation for offering challenging, integrated, cooperative learning experiences to students. Sarah told me, *"I loved doing it, but I started to feel a kind of tunnel vision thing. I missed seeing what was going on in the majority of the schools. Neither Parkside or Edgeview is a very diverse group."* She added that a parent of one of her TAG students, Dawn Simms, encouraged her to think about what was taking place in classrooms outside of the TAG program.

> *"Dawn would say things like, 'Sarah, I'd walk by other rooms and, even on the first day of school, the kids are sitting there filling out worksheets.' I'd say, 'Dawn, I don't believe this.' And she would say, 'They are.' She said, 'You know what you are doing is not just a TAG thing. Couldn't other kids do this?' I'd say, 'Of course, they could.' . . . So I started to think about it. And I thought I needed to go back out and see what was going on. So, Belmont Elementary had been closed* (for remodeling), *and when it reopened, I applied to go there. I was there two years and loved it. I loved being back in the world."*

During Sarah's tenure at Belmont Elementary, as a fourth grade "regular" classroom teacher, she served as supervisor for several student teachers from the nearby university through which she had earned her bachelor's degree. Over the course of these experiences, she became well acquainted with the university faculty member who directed student teaching placements within the Valley City area. Sarah described for me an incident which took place during her second year at Belmont, *"The director from the*

university came up and said to me, 'Would you like to go to graduate school next year
and supervise student teachers?' I went, 'I really haven't thought about it, but let me
think about it.' David (Sarah's husband) *and I talked about it, and we decided to do it.*
So this past year I finished my master's degree.'"

Because Sarah transferred in fifteen semester hours from a university she had
attended earlier in her career, she was able to complete her master's work at the
university relatively quickly, and also to begin taking courses towards a doctoral degree.
At the close of a year, however, she decided to put her doctoral work on hold and to
return to the elementary classroom. She explained:

> *"I only had a year leave of absence from Valley City. I wasn't willing to*
> *give that job up. I really missed teaching, I found. I really missed being*
> *in the schools. And also, while I was reading* (during graduate
> coursework), *I thought, 'I need to get back in there and to try some of*
> *these things.'*

For Sarah, *"these things"* included not only specific ideas for carrying out
curriculum planning and instructional practices, but also a deeper understanding of *"why*
I'm doing all these things." She mentioned to me three books which, over the course of
her graduate school experience, had significantly impacted her beliefs about teaching and
learning and children, To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher (1993) by William Ayers,
and You Can't Say You Can't Play (1992) and Kwanzaa and Me: A Teacher's Story
(1995), both by Vivian Gussin Paley. Sarah had reread the books over the summer
months; at present, both of the Paley books were on loan to Kelly Ainsworth, her former
classmate and present teaching colleague.

As my conversation with Sarah that August morning progressed, discussion of the
ideas presented by these authors became a focus which we regularly returned to. When I
specifically asked Sarah to describe her own "core beliefs" about teaching and learning
and children, she integrated into her responses what she described as *"general*
philosophies" or *"directions"* which she had derived from Ayers and Paley. Three
directions which were central to her responses included: 1) the idea that it is important to
meet the needs of *"all children"* within a *"regular"* and *"diverse"* classroom; 2) the idea
that it is important for all children to participate in a classroom *where "student-direction"*
is encouraged and valued; and 3) the idea that it is important for all children to perceive

their classroom *"as a good and safe place to be."* Ayers (1993) describes a process through which educators consider "core values" or "guides to future action." He explains that, while defining these beliefs does not "solve the problem of what to do in school," it does "provide a helpful lens through which to imagine and examine practice" (p. 136). As Sarah discussed with me practices which she imagined facilitating throughout the year to come, there was an evident connection between the practices she was explaining and the *"general directions"* that she had mentioned to me, particularly in regard to *"student direction"* and participation in the classroom. She talked about practices which she had tried during her past teaching experiences, such as integrating various subject areas by connecting them within theme-based units of study, and implementing reading/writing workshop time for her students. Sarah explained that these activities would take on new meaning this year because, although she had used them in the past, *"I really didn't have a full basis inside me of why I was doing it."* In addition, Sarah hoped to facilitate within her classroom two practices which were new for her, inquiry learning and class discussions or "rug-talks," both of which she had considered after reading Ayers and Paley. As I listened to Sarah describing her plans, I was anxious to observe what might occur when the school year began. I was aware that my presence and interaction across our interview may have impacted the direction of our conversation to some extent. I was eager to observe Sarah in actual practice situations. I was intrigued by her descriptions of directions she hoped to move in this year.

Diversity within a Classroom. Sarah's decision to leave TAG and return to a "regular" classroom was connected with her belief that academic diversity strengthens a classroom community. She emphatically told me, *"No matter what level the kids are on, whether they are 'learning disabled,' they're an 'average kid,' whatever that means, or they're ready to read on a fourth grade level, we can meet their needs in the classroom . . . and then you still get the diversity and the learning to work together with all levels and to appreciate all strengths."* It was interesting to me that, although Sarah was adamant concerning celebrating diversity as a strength, she included in her descriptions of diversity mention of educational labels which have held traditionally negative connotations for children. I again wondered whether her actual classroom practice would reflect acknowledgment of these public education "labels."

As we talked further, Sarah's focus on diversity took into account not only learning differences amongst class members, but also racial and cultural differences. She explained that her experiences in Valley City Schools had included working with children of *"several different cultures,"* naming Appalachian, African American and Thai as examples. Sarah expressed her support of a perspective espoused by Vivian Gussin Paley (1995) in <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u>. Paley asserts that the culturally diverse classroom, which she refers to as 'integrated,' is a positive starting point for examining and appreciating differences. She writes:

> "A plus for the integrated classroom (is that) we are constantly called upon to explain our differences to each other. In an all-white or all-black school there is, I am certain, less likelihood that we will look for ways to explain who we are. Yet even when there is only one color in a classroom, there are as many different stories as there are people in the group. *To look for ways to explain who we are:* this would seem to be a fundamental requirement for us all in a classroom" (pp. 56-57).

Sarah described a range of ideas that she considered to be opportunities for the children to "explain who they were" to others within the class community. On the first day of school, she and Kelly had planned to bring their own "legacy boxes" to share with the children as examples of *"a way for us to tell about us."* These "boxes" would be filled with selected items and artifacts that held personal meaning. Sarah described her own legacy box as a hand-made paper box, given to her by her sister, in which she would place photographs and other objects. She explained, *"I'll probably have a book, because I love to read, and I'll probably have something about food because I love to cook."* After sharing their boxes, Sarah and Kelly planned to ask the children to prepare their own boxes to share with the class later that week. Sarah told me that she viewed the legacy box construction as a starting point, explaining that she hoped to invite her students, shortly thereafter, to share family stories and also to participate in a picture inquiry project. She referred to these activities as opportunities for *"cultural exploration,"* and *"extensions of learning about yourself,"* which would allow all class members to *"learn what kinds of things we're interested in."* Her inspiration for this activity and its purposes was sparked by reading William Ayers (1993).

Ayers also addresses the need for children to share about themselves with fellow students, stating that, "The strongest source of knowledge about the student remains the

student herself, and tapping into that knowledge is not so difficult. Kids love to tell about themselves, and we can structure multiple opportunities for them to do so" (p. 42). Ayers asked his students to draw their families, create family trees, and bring to school "cultural artifacts" from home. He describes his classroom as a place in which a lot of energy was spent in exploring differences. Further, he purports that, "Exploring both our collective culture and our various cultural differences can become an incredibly rich intellectual adventure at any age" (p. 63).

Ayers' consideration of students' cultural differences incorporates, but is not limited to, information that he draws from each child. He explains that his work as a teacher involves purposeful "research" of his students, in an effort to better understand who they are. Ayers (1993) writes, "Teachers need to be one part detective: We sift the clues children leave, follow the leads, and diligently uncover the facts in order to fill out and make credible the story of their growth and development" (p. 33). Ayers extends this searching by inviting parents to share their knowledge of their children with him. He asserts that, "Parents are a powerful, usually underutilized source of knowledge about youngsters" (p. 39). As Sarah described how she planned to proceed to find out about each child, she also mentioned the importance of seeking parental input, referring explicitly to how her reading of Ayers influenced her to move in this direction. She explained:

> *"One of the things I'm going to invite them (parents) to do . . . in my first day letter that goes home . . . William Ayers brings up in <u>To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher</u>, to write back to me, tell me about your child. Because I thought . . . the parents know their kids a lot better than I do. I'm open. I want them to talk to me. And I'm going to say, 'Please feel free to write to me or make an appointment to come tell me about anything you need to know about your child that will help me be a better teacher.'"*

Vivian Gussin Paley (1995), in <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u>, considers the importance of parental involvement as well. Paley describes how she invited the mothers and fathers and even a grandfather of her students to share their own stories with the class, personal, family stories that provide the children with a richer glimpse into the cultures of their classmates. Paley writes of the impact of these stories, "The biggest surprise for me is the effect of the stories the parents tell, not only the black parents but all the parents. Except for the children's own stories, it will be their parents' memories that most make

us feel part of the same community" (p. 27). In our conversation, Sarah described for me her own desire to invite parents to share stories with her students, much as Paley had done:

> *"I'm going to invite the parents and say, 'As part of our unit on communication, we're starting to learn about our own families and our cultural backgrounds.' I'm going to invite them to come in and tell about, give some examples like they do in <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u>, come in and tell about a holiday you had when you were little, or how school was, or were there any games you liked to play, or something like that. I think that will open the lines . . . it will hopefully make them feel like I want them here and involved."*

Sarah's descriptions were framed by her desire to build a sense of community amongst class members, based upon a growing understanding of one another's differences. When she focused on parental input, she seemed to be describing the development of a collaborative relationship with parents. I felt that she was building upon ideals similar to those asserted by Sudia McCaleb (1994), who wrote:

> "The closest and most collaborative relationships that I have seen between teachers and families are those in which the coming together is on a human level of mutual respect and a sharing of knowledge and vulnerability. Parents are sought after as resources and are welcomed into the classroom . . . through investigation and study there is a constant flow of information from the school to the home and community and back again" (p. 39).

Sarah's considerations of both her students and their parents were grounded upon a basis of mutual respect.

<u>Student Direction within a Classroom</u>. As Sarah and I continued to talk about her beliefs about teaching and learning, her consideration of student involvement in the classroom went deeper than inviting students to share "who they were" with classmates. She talked about these invitations as related to an underlying foundational sense that she hoped to establish concerning the central place of the student across all aspects of the classroom experience. Sarah built upon Ayers' (1993) assertion that, "Teaching begins and ends with seeing the student," explaining that only as the student becomes more fully present to the teacher will the groundwork be laid upon which "real teaching can be constructed" (p. 25). Adding to this conception of teaching, Sarah expressed to me a hope that she holds, that *"students feel that what they have to say is important, and their*

questions are important, and their ideas are important . . . because I believe all kids have questions, and they all have wonderful ideas." Sarah's belief that her students *"all have wonderful ideas"* connects with the work of Eleanor Duckworth (1996), who asserts that, "The having of wonderful ideas is what I consider the essence of intellectual development. And I consider it the essence of pedagogy to give (a child) the occasion to have his wonderful ideas and to let him feel good about himself for having them" (p. 1). Sarah's considerations of her plans for curriculum and instruction for the coming school year were framed by her belief that children must have ample "occasions to have wonderful ideas."

Ayers (1993) suggests several venues in which these occasions might occur, stating that, "Youngsters need opportunities to choose, to name, and to pursue their own passions and projects, to develop some part of the class as their own" (p. 93). Sarah's considerations of providing students with these types of opportunities were reflective of Ayers' recommendation. Her expressed hopes for her classroom were laden with opportunities for student choices about individual learning pursuits and about personal responsibilities as class members, as well as opportunities for students to have a voice in collective class policy making and curricular planning. She told me that she desired for the class to be more *"student directed"* than her past classrooms had been, explaining:

> *"I realized this past year that I was always too teacher directed. And even though, if you came into my classroom, I was not lecturing, and we were always doing hands-on things, and the kids were involved. In fact, in my fourth grade we didn't even have desks, we had tables so they could be working cooperatively. But, when I thought about it . . . who picked the novels? I did. Who decided the science units and the experiments we were doing? I did. The best unit we every had came out accidentally, kind of . . . ended up to be an inquiry where I knew I wanted to do ecology. We were doing one of the activities I had planned, and the kids started getting into the discussion and ended up saying, 'You know, why aren't we doing it at our school? And how about our neighborhood?' and making their own plan for what they wanted to do, which was a much better unit than I had planned.*

In the area of learning pursuits, Sarah's plans were framed by what she referred to as *"inquiry"* - a curricular model which begins with encouraging students to think and reflect on ideas and problems that are personally meaningful. The way that Sarah talked about "inquiry" aligns with an explanation provided by Lalik and Dellinger (1996) who

describe the premises of this curricula as "allowing the learner to bring her own personal knowledge and reasons for knowing into the classroom. It is a process of involving students in the creation of curriculum, and not only curriculum, but the classroom community itself" (p. 1). Sarah explained to me the importance of inquiry learning within a *"student-directed"* classroom, *"If you're going to be student directed, you have to do inquiry access. I don't know how you can be student directed and not have the kids coming up with their questions and things they're going to answer."* She also described for me how she envisioned that inquiry learning might evolve within her classroom, beginning by describing the parameters of the second grade Standards of Learning (SOLs) for the state of Virginia (1995) as *"very broad,"* and purporting that within the parameters of the broad subject areas recommended by the SOLs there was room for inquiry learning. She gave an example:

> *"If we're doing animal life, we could spend several weeks reading and just getting information, coming up with questions about it. And then plan our unit on how can we answer those questions. And one group may be pursuing one area, and another group another area. And maybe I'm unrealistic, but I certainly think second grade can do that with my help, of just guiding them."*

Sarah added that the inquiry framework might be used not only in "required" subject areas, but also in *"kind of a free inquiry period where the kids get to pursue something they're interested in."* She and Kelly envisioned a situation where their students might be able to work together, perhaps two or three times per week, so that children with common interests would have the opportunity to work on joint projects, if they chose to do so. Sarah described the teacher's role during this inquiry period as that of, *"helping them get materials and talking about, 'Well, what would you like to do to show what you've learned?'"*

Sarah's descriptions of a *"free inquiry period where the kids get to pursue something they're interested in,"* parallels depictions of inquiry-based learning shared by Ayers and others. Ayers' (1993) discussion of what he calls "a ME curriculum," includes consideration of qualities which the inquiry period might be characterized by, "In any ME curriculum, there is variation and open-endedness. This allows students to face and see one another, and it allows the teacher to behold the student . . . (it provides) a chance

to author and invent something of personal importance" (pp. 76-77). Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson and Crawford (1996) also write about the characteristics of an inquiry-based curriculum, describing it as a curriculum in which "students (are) actively and reflectively involved in curriculum as collaborative decision makers about the focus of class inquiries and the questions they want to pursue in their own inquiries" (p. 4). In these descriptions, inquiry-based learning is shown as having students' interests and questions as its starting point and driving force. Students' decisions guide not only their topic choices, but also their approaches to research and construction of products to represent their learning about personal topics.

In addition to her focus upon student-direction within the area of curriculum, Sarah talked with me about the position of the student within the realm of class policy discussion and collective decision making. Her remarks were framed by the idea of seeing the class as a *"community,"* in which members were able to think through and discuss responsibilities, guidelines and consequences that they would be held to collectively. Concerning the idea of building *"community,"* Sarah often referred to considerations presented in two recent works by Vivian Paley. Paley, in <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u> (1995) points out the importance of considering all members' feelings and opinions about class decisions and concerns, when she cites a statement made by a fellow teacher who was committed to establishing "a real community" within her classroom: "When you give out orders and don't bother to ask children how they feel about them, you destroy community. Community means you can be yourself, do what you need to do, talk about what's on your mind, no matter how long it takes you to state your case" (p. 92). Sarah's hope was to invite students' ideas, responses and concerns when decisions that would impact the group were under consideration, at least to the greatest degree which she believed would be in their best interests.

Sarah discussed with me her personal concerns about "giving out orders," explaining that she did not want to say to students on the first day of school, *"Okay, here is rule one, two, three. When you break it, here's what happens."* She added, *"This is already, 'here's how you're going to get into trouble!'"* Instead, she hoped to bring the need to establish class policies before the students and solicit their input. She described an idea she had for beginning this type of conversation with her students,

"I found a book, <u>The Circle of Friends</u>, which talks about how we work together, and I thought about reading that and talking about how we're going to be together all year, and we're going to be working in all kinds of different situations and sharing ideas, and so forth. 'What do we need to be able to do to work together?' And come up with some ideas which I will record; we'll have a chart. And talk about, 'how can we help each other remember those things?' 'And what can we do if we forget?' 'How can we help, stop and remind?'"

Sarah admitted that she did not expect perfect behavior from her student, but that she anticipated working through problems as a community when there was a need to. She referred to a practice that she might try with her students, similar to the "talks on the rug" facilitated by Paley in <u>You Can't Say You Can't Play</u> (1992). Sarah described an example for me:

"When incidents happen in the room, they gather on the rug and they talk. 'This has just happened. John is feeling sad.' John's over there sobbing, you know. 'John is feeling sad because he wanted to come play with Mark and so forth, and he wouldn't let him. How could we have handled that?' And, you know, Mark's over here going, 'But we already had the game set!' But, you know, working it out, how can we learn to cooperate? What could we have done?"

In her book, <u>You Can't Say You Can't Play</u>, Paley (1992) explains that when it seems that a class "rule" is needed, such as "You can't say, 'you can't play,'" open discussion occurs first. She quotes a response she made to her students, "'You can't say you can't play' is not our plan yet. Or, rather, it's a plan, but not a rule. We're *planning* for it. We're talking about it, getting opinions, thinking about it, wondering how it will work" (p. 56). In her later book, <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u>, Paley (1995) notes a benefit of holding such negotiations, referring to a comment made by one of her student's parents. She suggests that collective discussion of problems is one of the things that keep telling us we are a community (p. 66).

<u>Feeling Safe within a Classroom</u>. Although Sarah spoke at length about the classroom curriculum and community environment within the framework of student-direction, there was one exception. She asserted that there may come a point where a teacher does need to establish a non-negotiable rule for the common good of all students. She explained, *"You may have to have a few basic rules, like 'you don't hurt.' That's a safety rule; nobody hurts anybody else. I think Vivian Paley talks about that in her <u>You</u>*

Can't Say You Don't Play. That's just one of their rules. You can't hit someone, kick them, bite them, whatever."

Both Paley and Ayers speak to the need for each child to sense that they are "safe" within a classroom environment. Ayers (1993) suggests that a sense of security is foundational to learning, "We learn when we feel good about ourselves and others, when we trust the environment and the people in our lives, when we are safe" (pp. 62-63). He also cites the work of Mara Sapon-Shevin (1990) who supports his assertion, and adds that the teacher is the one who must establish the boundaries of safety, trust, truth-telling and fidelity within the classroom community.

Paley, in <u>Kwanzaa and Me</u> (1995), develops the idea of students perceiving a school to be a safe harbor. She quotes a colleague's principal who stated, "What our school has to be is a safe harbor. Whatever else is going on in these kids' lives, we can't control or change it. But when they cross our threshold, this is a safe harbor." Paley extends the image of the safe harbor to include not only a sense of physical safety but also a sense of emotional safety. Recalling feelings of discrimination during her own childhood, and the shame and fear that resulted, Paley suggests that, for her, "a safe harbor is a place where you are able to tell the truth about yourself and not feel ashamed" (p. 130).

For Paley, and for Sarah, a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior seemed to be drawn according to whether or not another class member was hurt, whether physically or emotionally. Sarah described for me how she hoped that her students would feel when they left her room after the first day of school, *"I don't want them to go home scared. I want them to think it's a safe place to be, that Mrs. Rhea is interested in what they have to say and in them, and that the other people in the room are."*

<u>Getting There</u>. Towards the end of our conversation, Sarah talked about the distinction between her envisioned ideals and the reality of moving towards those ideals with second grade children. She mentioned that she and Kelly had recently spent a considerable amount of time discussing their plans for the year ahead, describing the focus of their conversations, *"We laughed because we had this vision of this kind of flowing back and forth (of students between their classrooms). No problems, just flowing*

here and there, very natural. Everybody excited and everyone actively doing what they're doing. Then we laughed and we said, 'I wonder how we're going to get there? I don't know!'"

Rather than talking about step-by-step "methods" for putting ideals into practice, Sarah and I focused upon foundational beliefs - and possible examples of how these beliefs might "look" within a second grade classroom.   Throughout our conversation, Sarah referred often to how essential it was for her to continually reflect upon her practices - as she developed curricular plans, as she thought about how to construct class discussions, as she considered how well or poorly something had gone on a given day. She mentioned that Kelly's presence next door was significant, telling me that they had already selected three times when they might meet before school officially started, *"to talk about how we saw ourselves working together that would be to the benefit of the kids . . . and what we wanted to do that first week, and what did we think was the purpose for us being together and how could that help the kids to learn?"* It was apparent to me that Sarah looked forward to meeting with Kelly regularly across the course of the school year. Their relationship provided for her opportunities to reflect and work through shared concerns and interests and a chance to be part of a mutually supportive working relationship. She explained:

> *"It's very comforting to have Kelly here. When I thought about coming here, I thought about, 'Oh yeah, I could do this,' but thinking about doing this by myself would be a lot scarier. Even though I've taught fifteen years . . . I'm also coming in knowing that I want to do some things differently that expand or go a different direction totally. Having someone who understands that and is trying to do the same thing herself, to change in that same direction - because Kelly and I have talked about becoming more student directed and she wants to do that too - it's just so good to have someone else that understands that. And it makes me feel more secure about taking that risk of doing it.   We've agreed it's not always going to go well, but that's OK, because it shouldn't always go well . . . and we have to remember that. But it's OK. We can run next door afterward and say, 'Oh my gosh, this was a disaster, how did yours go?' And help each other and do some things together and watch each other."*

In a sense, this relationship provided Sarah with a needed "safe harbor - a place where she could tell the truth and not feel ashamed."

September - October 1996: Unfamiliar Trust

> *"We have to try to make these kids feel like people - feel like they're
> worth something. Most of the kids from this area don't feel good about
> themselves . . . and they don't want anybody to feel good as long as
> they're feeling bad. Misery loves company. So . . . they pick on you,
> they pick on me, they pick on the whole damn community because
> they feel so trapped in their own situation" (McLaren, 1989, p. 98).*

Sarah's descriptions of early interactions with her students were unsettling, particularly a depiction of a conversation that took place with a boy named Evan. On the first day of the new school year, Evan proceeded to tell Sarah: "I'm bad. I've always been bad. I was suspended seven times and they had to move me to a whole other class last year." Sarah told me later, *"And that was his opinion of himself . . . Bad."* Although she did not elaborate on what the descriptor "bad" meant to Evan, Sarah did emphasize to me that Evan seemed to connect the idea of being "bad" with his past school experiences, including his suspensions during first grade. William Ayers (1993) writes that he has worked with children who hold a similar perspective of themselves, and for whom, "the path to the principal's office is a deep rut they have walked many times" (p. 3). I would soon find out that Evan wasn't the only child in Sarah's classroom who perceived himself in this light.

Although Sarah's class roll fluctuated for the first few months of school, it later settled to include thirteen students. Sarah described the initial group of twelve children for me. There were seven boys and five girls in the class. Evan, Anthony, Alton, Vincent, Regina and Marcie were African American. Meredith, Christy, Erin, Ronnie, Jonathan and Chip were white. Six of the children were being raised by single parents, four lived with both parents, and one lived with his grandmother; I was not able to find out with whom one of the children was living. Seven of the children took advantage of the school's free breakfast and lunch program, while the others frequently brought packed lunches and occasionally purchased their lunches. The neighborhoods from which the children came were largely scattered with apartments, housing projects and small single-family homes.

I was anxious to meet and work with these children, but because I did not receive official permission to research until the beginning of November, I was not able to observe

and take fieldnotes in Sarah's classroom during the first two months of the school year. Instead, my understandings of this crucial time are based almost exclusively upon Sarah's descriptions of classroom events, interactions and routines. I talked to Sarah informally across the course of these months - generally by phone, although I was invited to visit as a class guest on September 9th for Legacy Box sharing. At the time, I was distressed because of my inability to observe firsthand in Sarah's classroom for what seemed to me to be a lengthy period of time. In retrospect, however, my feelings about this delay have shifted somewhat, based upon conversations that I have since had with Sarah. I've considered that my presence in Sarah's classroom during September and October might have created an added sense of anxiety for Sarah at a time when stress levels were already high for her.

September 4, 1996. Two days of school had passed, and I was anxious to hear how things were going. I phoned both Sarah and Kelly that evening and was able to reach Kelly first. She was upbeat, explaining that she just seemed to "get on a high the first week of each school year and stay there all week." Kelly added, however, that the week had not been without stress. Several of the first grade teachers had approached Sarah and Kelly, alerting them that last year had been largely devoted to dealing with behavior problems with the group that would be this year's second graders, and that very little actual learning had occurred. Some had specifically addressed Sarah when they saw her class roster, telling her, "Oh, you have all of those kids. What a terrible group that is."

This occurrence is similar to one experienced by first grade teacher, Yvonne Hutchinson, who stated to author Mike Rose (1995), "I've had teachers tell me, 'This class can't think; they can't do the work; I can't find anything they can do'" (p. 15). Hutchinson explains, though, that her response to the comments of these teachers reflects a very different perspective: "I'm astounded. You can look at a child and see that brightness, that eagerness. People who come to the classroom with preconceived notions about the kids don't give them a chance. It angers me and saddens me" (p. 15). I believed it was significant that, despite the early struggles that Sarah experienced with her new group of students, she never once described them as children who were a "terrible group" or children who "could not learn." As Hutchinson did, Sarah framed her

descriptions of her students differently than their past teachers had.

When I asked Kelly about the children in Sarah's class, she described:

> "Her class, being the second grade 'inclusion' class, has a few children
> with learning disabilities, but for the most part she has kids who have been
> labeled as 'behavior problems' by teachers in the past. Sarah only had ten
> children yesterday, and we were worried that they might transfer one of us
> up to fourth grade and combine our classes. But today a new girl entered
> the school, and even though she was supposed to go to me, they
> transferred her to Sarah's room. Sarah also got another child today, so
> now she has twelve."

Kelly mentioned that the low numbers would be important for Sarah, because "there are few children in her class that are not difficult. Sarah is always so positive, but I know that this has to be really hard for her. When her kids visited my class today, I saw the look in their eyes that I had seen with my kids in an East Coast large inner city school - the really hardened look that is almost scary - especially with seven year olds."

Later that evening I was able to reach Sarah by phone. Though I asked how she was doing, she didn't say a lot. She did mention that she was tired, explaining, *"I used to be able to not feel this way at the beginning of the year!"* About her week she said only, *"Things are a little crazy."* Given the difficulties that Kelly had described to me, I was impressed that Sarah did not focus on her students as the "problems" that were creating her fatigue. Instead, we closed our conversation by talking about when I might visit to take part in the legacy box activity as a class guest.

September 5, 1996. On the third day of school, Sarah conducted the second of many class discussions that she would hold regularly over the course of the year. She explained to me that the group's first collective discussion had taken place on the opening day of school. I learned later that Sarah often held discussions with her students, for purposes similar to those that Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) describe when explaining the function of "class meetings." They write that during these meetings, "students learn social skills such as listening, taking turns, hearing different points of view, negotiating, communicating, helping one another and taking responsibility for their own behavior" (p. x).

Sarah explained that on the first day of school her specific purpose for the opening class discussion was to find out what her students' expectations were for second

grade.   Ayers (1993) describes his similar approach with students at the beginning of each school year, "I have almost always begun the year by asking students to think about their own learning agendas: What do you want to do this year? What do you hope to get out of it?" (p. 43) Likewise, Sarah asked her students what they wanted to do during second grade and wrote down their responses on a large piece of chart paper. Clearly, she fully expected that her students had hopes and wishes to share.

Sarah reported to me that an overwhelming majority of the children told her that they wanted to be able to read. Only Jonathan, Christy and Meredith admitted that they were "readers" already. Sarah explained, *"The others, even though they definitely had the basics of reading and were emerging readers, did not think of themselves as reading. I remember Ronnie saying, 'I don't know how to read.' I said, 'The only way you're going to learn how to read is to read . . . you're going to have to read with me or with a buddy or by yourself.' I told them, 'You all will learn to read. You will all read by the end of the year.' They went like, 'Yeah??!!'"*

Given the desire to read that her students talked about, Sarah offered them many opportunities to choose books to read and spend time looking at them, amongst other activities, during the first few days of school. She told me later, however, that by the third day she sensed the need for a second class discussion. She explained that it quickly became apparent to her that while the kids seemed to be enjoying themselves during independent reading activities, they did not seem prepared to utilize their classroom choices towards the purpose of learning. Instead, she felt that they viewed the choices they had been given as opportunities to play. She explained, *"None of the kids had ever been in a classroom like mine. The first and second day they kept saying to me, 'Where are the worksheets? Where are our color sheets? Where is the real work?' And that was absolutely flabbergasting to me. They enjoyed me reading to them and things, but they were kind of thinking, 'Oh I don't have to be serious here; this isn't real work.'"* Sarah explained that she believed these children had learned that "real work" involved docility. She sensed that the participatory opportunities she was inviting them to engage in must seem foreign.

The class discussion that occurred on day three focused on Sarah's desire for her students to understand the wishes and expectations that *she* had for the group. Sarah

related:

> *"I suddenly realized, 'They have no idea. This is too confusing for them.'*
> *So we sat and we talked about second grade and how it would be different*
> *this year, and that real work would be when they were laying on the rug*
> *reading . . . that wasn't play for them. No one had ever asked them to read*
> *independently and they just thought that was play time . . . they'd look at a*
> *book, and then they'd go over and play with so and so and do whatever.*
> *So we had to talk about that that was work, and when they were working*
> *in teams together and designing something - that was work, and when I*
> *read to them that was part of their reading, and so forth."*

Sarah mentioned that she placed a substantive focus upon reading during this talk about "real work," because of the emphasis that the children had placed upon it in sharing their own expectations earlier that week. She explained to me later that she hoped that her children might realize that she viewed activities such as independent reading, "center time," and collaborative group work as real learning responsibilities.

Mike Rose (1995) describes a similar focus emphasized by first grade teacher Stephanie Terry, whom he interviewed. Terry told him, "They (her students) come to know that this is the place where they do good work, and that they won't get as much done . . . if everything is chaotic" (p. 111). Like Terry, Sarah wanted her students to know that even though their "real work" in second grade (as the kids described it) would not include the worksheets and coloring pages that they were accustomed to, they would still be expected to work hard at learning, although through different activities and experiences.

September 9, 1996. I was invited to visit Sarah's class today to join in during Legacy Box sharing. As I entered the classroom doorway, a little girl, who I later learned was Sereita, walked over and greeted me, politely stating, "Welcome to Mrs. Rhea's class." I thanked her and noticed that the rest of the class members were seated in a large circle on the rug in the back corner, and that all eyes were focused on our interaction for the moment. Sarah invited me to join the group, and I did so, sitting down with my legacy box, a paper mache basket, on my lap. After I had settled in, Sarah explained that each person could select and describe five items in their box for the rest of us. A boy with sandy blonde hair, Ronnie, shared first. His box held miniature toys and gadgets - a tiny globe, a pen with special functions and other unique items. As he described his toys

in an animated fashion, some of the other boys interjected comments, Sarah reminding the group occasionally that Ronnie had the floor. Ronnie was given the option to choose who might take the next turn, and he selected a boy nearby whose name was Chip. Chip hesitated a little, seeming reluctant to share. At Sarah's urging he held up a couple of books and other items, but not enthusiastically. When Evan commented on Chip's presentation, Chip retorted back to him angrily. At this, Sarah again reminded the kids to be courteous. I noticed, too, that she had been jotting names down on a notepad at various points throughout the activity. In addition, between sharers she gave compliments to several of the children for their *"good listening"* and immediately proceeded to distribute "listening coupons" to them, which she pulled out of a wicker basket.

After proceeding through several sharers, at about 10:30 she explained to the class that I would be leaving at lunch time and suggested that I take my Legacy Box turn next. I shared my items, some photographs, a cassette tape and some things that reminded me of family members. When I showed a group picture of the first class of elementary students I had taught, hands reached out from several directions to grab it. I volunteered to pass the picture around, and Sarah consented. When I was finished, Sarah thanked me for sharing, passed out a few more listening coupons, and asked the kids, one by one, to line up for lunch.

Mid September. In a fall interview, Sarah told me that she had not initially planned on using listening coupons with her students. In fact, she and Kelly had originally hoped not to utilize any form of behavior management "system" or "rewards." They decided differently shortly into the school year, when Kelly posed the idea of a "point system" and both teachers decided to put the idea into practice. Sarah explained that back in August she had hoped *"that we would not have to do any discipline, that we could just talk about how the behavior should be and so forth . . .* (but) *after the first week we thought, 'Oh, this wasn't working so well.'"* Sarah's early intent with her students had been the formation of a sense of community, and her classroom activity and policy choices had been aimed at supporting this development. Sarah explained to me, though, that when given freedom in the area of personal behavior, she believed that many of the children had acted in ways that were destructive to the community as a whole. She

shared examples, *"A child would stand up and yell out loud,"* or *"kick their desk"* or *"run around the room like a maniac."* Sarah described a shift in her thinking that occurred during this period of time:

> *"It was just flabbergasting to me that, after sixteen years, I was struggling this way . . . In the beginning I was just really trying to get them to develop a community feel. I so much wanted it to be so student-centered that I think I was even giving some of them a little too much freedom. And they didn't know how to handle that at the beginning. So I really had to kind of go backwards, which is always hard to do, but go backwards and set up more specific standards for them. And then be real consistent on it . . . I don't think I was giving them enough structure."*

As Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) describe, Sarah perceived that "when young people are learning a new way of looking at things and new ways of handling problems, sometimes things get worse before they get better" (p. 119). They add a recommendation for teachers, "If the students aren't responding with the enthusiasm you'd hoped for, don't be discouraged. Keep plugging away in small steps and trust that they will all come together eventually to help the class" (p. 119). Although Sarah admitted to me later that it was difficult to avoid becoming discouraged at times, she and Kelly did agree to backtrack somewhat from the full-blown freedom of choice that they had originally intended to offer students, and to take smaller, slower steps towards this direction. By mid-September both Sarah and Kelly had begun to use listening coupons as incentives for good behavior, as well as classroom rules, which Sarah referred to as "Expectations." They also implemented point systems that kept track of each child's adherence to the established expectations.

The listening coupons were small coupon-size pieces of paper with "Listening Coupon" typed on each. Children received these for following directions, participating in class discussions and treating each other kindly. Once a coupon was earned, a child could then write his or her name on the back of the coupon and put it into a large manila envelope taped to the blackboard that said "Good Listening Coupons" on it. The names of two children were drawn weekly from the envelope, and the kids chosen could invite a friend to have a picnic with them on Sarah's corner rug during lunch time one day, rather than going to the cafeteria with the rest of the class. Sarah explained that she preferred picnics over *"a grab bag or prizes . . .* (because) *they get to invite a friend, and this is*

building up their social (development).*"* Her strategy was to connect the incentives with a community focus by selecting a reward that included building and enjoying positive relationships with others.

        Two of the four class "expectations" that Sarah introduced to her students were also associated with relating to others in positive ways. One was "Treat others as you want to be treated." Another was "Respect teachers, students, and all staff." The remaining expectations were "Follow all directions," and "Complete all assigned work on time" (See Figure 6). For Sarah, both of these expectations related to the idea of *"being there to learn,"* a purpose which she told me she wanted to emphasize within her class.

Figure 6. Class Expectations and a Point Chart were Posted on the Chalkboard.

        Sarah also introduced a "point system" to her kids, which she believed would support the class expectations, providing a physical way to monitor whether or not children were acting within these established boundaries. Kelly had come up with the

idea for the specific point system, and she and Sarah had both decided to adopt it. They explained that by mutually using the system, there would be consistency for the students as they moved back and forth between the two classrooms. Children's points were tracked on a chart, which consisted of four square pieces of poster board, taped vertically down the far end of the blackboard. The top poster was red with the number "4" and "Great!" printed on it, the next down was a blue poster with "3" and "Good!" on it, then came a green poster with "2" and "Fair" on it, and, at the bottom, was a yellow poster with "1" and "Needs Improvement" on it (See Figure 6).

As each morning began, Sarah clipped clothespins, each having a child's name on it, to the red "4" square. She told me that she wanted to send to her kids the message that, *"every day they started fresh,"* no matter what had occurred the day before. Children's clothespins, or "clips" as she referred to them with the children, remained on the "4" square throughout the day, unless they *"chose"* to violate a class expectation. If this occurred, Sarah moved the child's clip to the next poster down. Next to the four posters, on a white chart, Sarah had listed an explanation of what occurred when a child's clip landed on a given level. The chart read, "4=Good Behavior; 3=1 Warning; 2=Lose free time; 1=Parent call, lose free time."

Sarah used the chart to determine the privileges the children could participate in across any given day. If a child's clip was moved to the "2" poster, for example, then he or she was not given the opportunity to participate in Learning Centers during their free time that day. These "centers" that Sarah invited her students to choose from and participate in for about 20 to 30 minutes daily included Math, Science, Writing, Listening, Puzzle, Book Corner, Puppet and Mail Center stations, located in various places around the classroom. Sarah's centers were quite similar to "learning stations" that Mike Rose (1995) observed in teacher Elena Castro's third grade classroom. Rose writes of the learning station time he witnessed, "A visit to the classroom, then, might yield one group of children bent over stories in progress at the Writer's Table, with one of the students, brow furrowed, editing a story on the computer at the Publishing Station. A second group might be working on mathematics, one or two receiving audio-taped guidance at the listening station" (p. 68). At centers, Sarah's students were free to choose among possibilities such as book corner, where they could read on their own or with a

friend, puppet station, where they could work with a box of craft supplies to construct puppets or other figures, or science center, where they could create their own simple experiments with equipment such as a microscope and slides or a fingerprint kit. If their clip landed on poster 2, however, denoting "loss of free time," they were not eligible to select from these daily offerings.

A final connection to the daily point system was the establishment of what Sarah and Kelly called "Fun Friday." If their students earned at least fifteen personal points over the course of a week, they were eligible to participate in a fun activity on Friday afternoon. Activities across the course of the year included playing board games, flying kites, going outside, or viewing a videotape that a child brought from home. Often Sarah offered one activity option in her room and Kelly provided a different activity. Children from both classes were able to select either activity to join. If children did not earn the cumulative fifteen points that would enable them to participate in Fun Friday, they used the allotted time as a study hall. Later in the year, when I was regularly present on Fridays, I frequently took the study hall group to a back table in the school library, where the children read or drew pictures quietly.

Late September. Just weeks after incorporating the coupons, expectations, points, and privileges, Sarah became concerned about what direction these "systems" might be moving the class towards. Her concerns developed after she considered a two column list that Mr. Dixon, the building principal, had distributed to teachers, titled, "Is your Classroom Student-Centered or Teacher-Centered?" The columns on the document listed qualities of both types of classrooms. Sarah described her thoughts after reading through the list:

> *"I remember reading down the 'student-centered' thinking, 'Yep, yep, should do all those things,' and then knowing I wasn't doing all of those. So I made an appointment with John. And I said, 'Love this list, but I'm not doing all of those, like here . . .' One was, if you were truly student-centered you did not have rules and a discipline program with points or anything like that. And I said, 'Look, right here it says no management system.' And I said, 'I have one. I just put one up . . . How do I do it? How do you work that out?. . . I want to be student centered. So this is wrong, obviously.'"*

Mr. Dixon's response surprised Sarah, and also provided her with support and

insight. She described what he explained to her, *"He said, 'If they haven't had the freedom in another classroom, they don't know how to handle freedom, they don't have that inner structure. They don't have those resources inside them yet, and you have to kind of give them the guidelines . . . but hopefully as you go . . . then they will be able to move away from such a strong reliance on it.'"* His response aligns with Nelsen, Glenn and Lott's (1997) assertion that, "It takes time to create an atmosphere of caring, communication skills and mutual respect" (p. 37). Sarah told me that she left their conversation with the sense that her use of these classroom systems may be needed at present, to support the kids as they developed their own inner structures for living amongst others in a classroom where choices and responsibilities were abundant. As Sarah continued to move through the first quarter, utilizing the management plans she had established, she mentioned that there were times when she still questioned her direction, but often remembered Mr. Dixon's counsel. She explained:

> *"I'd think, 'I shouldn't have to tell them this,' and then I thought, 'Well, actually I do, because no one's ever taught them that . . . and when you've gone through seven years and never had the opportunity to work that way, you don't know how to handle it.'   I knew there were boundaries, but some of our kids don't know that. And that takes a long time. You don't just teach that in a week. So then I felt, 'OK, good.   I'm legitimate in meeting this.' I mean, this is something they need."*

Sarah's evolving perceptions of her students' needs align closely with that of fifth grade teacher, Ushma Shah (1996), who writes that in her pre-service teaching days she imagined, "Rules will not be a part of my classroom. Students will learn on their own how to wait until their turn to speak, how to engage in effective dialogue, how to exit the room and walk in halls in an appropriate way" (p. 59). Shah adds, though, that, "Now, as a fifth grade teacher, I have learned that these ideas were naive and not rooted in an understanding of a 32-student, urban classroom reality. However, I have not abandoned the commitment to a more participatory and cooperative classroom that guided my thoughts as an undergraduate. Instead, I am learning that teaching students to take responsibility for their voices and actions is a process" (pp. 59-60). In a very similar way, I believe that Sarah began to view the movement of the group towards acting responsibly and positively as a *"community"* to be a process.

Early October. Alton was good at the very beginning of the school year, Sarah

told me. She explained, *"I think he was feeling things out. He was shy, kind of scared. I mean, he has a lot of fear. I think that's behind a lot of his anger. And then, as he started to feel comfortable, he said, 'Well, I can just do what I want here.'"* At that point, however, Sarah held to the class expectations that she had established, and Alton responded with violent anger that was displayed both verbally and physically. Sarah described the verbal outbursts that Alton engaged in:

> *"He could be verbally abusive for hours on end. And we would go on and ignore him, and the guidance counselor's in here taking notes, and he would go on for hours of, 'I hate you. You're ugly. You're a big fathead. I'm not doing it.' I mean, he would not take a breath for an hour and a half to two hours . . . Sometimes he would yell it. And we would just go on, which was really hard. The kids, amazingly, seemed to ignore it. But inside me, I'm like, you're hearing every word, you're making sure he's not hitting anybody, and you're trying to have a class lesson and give everybody else comfort."*

Even more disturbing for Sarah were Alton's physical explosions. She told me, *"Alton was suspended three times in two to three weeks, for violence - severe violence. It was fast."* Sarah described these events as characterized by, *"a total lack of control where he just went nuts and hit and screamed and kicked."* On one occasion Alton attacked Sarah directly, *"he blew up and hit me . . . and kicked me and broke my watch."* Following each violent outburst, John Dixon required that Alton be suspended from school. Sarah explained, *"John was right there. Each time he was right behind me on that. He kept saying to Alton and his mother, 'He may not be here if he hurts; he may not be here.'"* Mr. Dixon's consistent enforcement exemplifies a basic principle of "the good common school" that First and Gray (1991) describe. They write that within this type of school, "The principal is committed to the preservation of a safe school environment . . . Abusive treatment of others is not tolerated; there are clear consequences if it occurs, whether perpetrated by students or staff" (p. 7). Sarah expressed to me her appreciation of John's support across even the most difficult encounters with Alton. She believed that Alton's third suspension made a significant impression on him, and described his reaction to the suspension, which was different than his responses had been on both previous occasions:

> *"When he gets real angry, he sobs and his face gets blown up and tears come down. And he was sobbing in the office, 'I don't want to go home. I*

like this classroom. I don't want to go home.' And John said, 'I'm glad you like the classroom. And we both were saying, 'But as long as you hit you cannot be here. If you want to stay here you have to stop hitting.' He had to show us that we could trust him to be with others, because we couldn't let anyone else be there and be endangered . . . That wasn't fair to them. That made a connection, after three times."

Mid October. Sarah explained that Evan was another child who had difficulty controlling his anger. Sarah gave an account of what occurred one afternoon when Evan missed the bus because he had not followed Sarah's directions to get packed and ready to leave on time. *"He threw a fit . . . Furniture was thrown, chairs were going, books were flying. He broke the easel, he kicked it . . . he just erupted."* After Evan left that afternoon, Sarah contemplated how she might respond when he returned the next morning. She decided that she would provide Evan with an opportunity to act positively and responsibly, asking him to repair the damage done to the easel. Before he arrived the next day, Sarah arranged with the school janitor, Mr. Thomas, for Evan to work with him on the repairs. Sarah's class was scheduled to take a bus to a nearby location for an hour of swimming, and she planned for Evan to work with Mr. Thomas during that time period. She explained what happened when Evan returned to school in the morning:

> *"We sat down and talked about it the next morning. I asked, 'Do you remember what happened?' because sometimes they're so angry they don't remember. He said, 'Yes . . . I'm sorry. Sometimes I have trouble controlling my temper.' I said, 'What could we do about it?' We talked about it. I said, 'Since you broke it, who do you think should fix it?' He said, 'I should.' I said, 'During swimming time you're going to stay here and fix it.' He said, 'Huh? I don't want to miss swimming.' I said, 'I know you don't. But I don't think it's fair; no one else can use it until it's fixed. Mr. Thomas is going to come up and get you.' Mr. Thomas was wonderful. He came up and got him, worked on it in the hall, brought his tool kit. As we were walking, going to swimming, he was with Mr. Thomas. He said, 'I'm going to go. I can run after that bus and catch it.' Mr. Thomas looked over and said, 'You're just going to stay right here son. You broke it. You're fixing it.' And that was the end of it. I thought that might be a good influence. Evan does not have a black man in his life.* (I thought) *that that was probably a good relationship. Then Mr. Thomas came up at the end of the day to check on how Evan was doing, and he eats lunch with him sometimes, so that's good."*

Late October. Sarah told me that there were two things which sustained her work with Alton and Evan throughout the unpredictable fall months. One was John Dixon's

support, which *"he never let slide."* The other was the use of individually based contracts with both boys. Sarah sought the counsel of two trusted sources as she considered how to develop the contracts, Mary Linden, Sarah's mother and a respected educator, and Anne Martin, a fellow teacher and close friend. Sarah described her encounters with each individual:

> *"My friend, Anne Martin, used to teach for years, E.D. kids. And I remember her doing contracts and all kinds of these things, and I called and said, 'I have these two kids, and I don't really think they're E.D., but they are showing a lot of E.D. behavior.' She took me out three afternoons for coffee and spelled out what I needed to do for their contracts . . . And then I called my mother, who was supervisor of special ed., so she's worked in it all of her life. I said, 'Here's what Anne said, what do you think?' And then I met with* (Alton and Evan) *individually, and they each had different contracts based on them."*

The contracts signified mutual agreements between Sarah and each of the boys. As the boys followed class expectations, Sarah checked off blanks on charts which were taped to their desks; the blanks represented increments of time across the course of a day. At various points, if several blanks were checked, the boys earned specific privileges that they had arranged with Sarah. Sarah described the differences between the two contracts:

> *"Evan's went in half hour increments of checking, and he worked towards art and computer time. Alton's were fifteen minute blocks . . . and he had the whole school involved . . . He had first said that he wanted to work toward art time, and I bought him a little sketch pad and he went to the little table outside and he could water color or sketch, and that worked real well for about two or three weeks; then that was boring to him. So I went to all the special* (area) *people, and he had about eight different things that he worked toward, depending on the day. He had a little schedule at the bottom, and I would highlight what he was working for* (that day). *That's how he got to start reading to preschool, he could help in the library, he got a special art time with the art teacher, the computer lady gave him an extra time . . . They looked at their schedule and when they could fit him in, then I plugged that in, so he had a lot of different things . . . And he had to get his checks to get there."*

Sarah believed that, over time, the contracts provided both Evan and Alton with a sense that they could be *"good."* She explained:

> *"I was always there checking. So they were immediately starting to think, 'Oh yeah, look, I'm good. Look at this. I can be good.' Of course it didn't work every single moment. If Alton didn't have his checks and*

didn't get to go someplace, he would get angry. 'Well I don't care about that anyway; I hate art time!' I wouldn't say anything, and when he would calm down again and go on, I would go back to giving him checks for the next part. I think it was good for them both to see consistently that, one, every day they started fresh, and that as soon as they were good I was going to recognize that, and you know, they weren't making me dislike them."

Sarah provided more for Evan and Alton than her maintenance of the contractual agreements they had established. In addition, she encouraged them to trust her. Sarah talked to me about her relationship with the boys during this period of time:

> *"I believe they both felt that their last year's teachers disliked them. But* (this year) *they would come in every day, no matter how horrible they had been . . . when Alton blew up and hit me and kicked me and broke my watch, when he came back after suspension . . . I gave him a hug and said, 'I'm glad you're back.' And I liked him. And it was real hard to get rid of me. And that was a hard barrier to break. They had to learn that, 'Hm, you know, she's kind of always there; maybe I can start to trust her a little bit.'"*

For Sarah, their trust in her was foundational; it enabled them to believe that she perceived them differently than past teachers had, and laid the groundwork for them to consider that they may, in fact, be able to act differently than they had in the past.

November - December 1996:   The Crucible

> ***"Real community is forged out of struggle . . . The fights, arguments, tears and anger are the crucible from which a real community grows" (Christensen, 1994a, p. 50).***

Linda Christensen (1994a), a high school teacher, relates that one winter break she read a book on teaching that, "left me feeling desolate because the writer's vision of a joyful, productive classroom did not match the chaos I faced daily" (p. 50). She continues by describing the realization that remembrances of her own teaching experiences set within "a compassionate, warm safe place," had often been based upon recollections of the final quarter of previous school years.

Not often have I read about what Christensen refers to as "the crucible," the formative, even chaotic experiences and events that lay the foundation for a "joyful and productive" class community to develop. First grade teacher, Stephanie Terry, explained

115

to Mike Rose (1995) that the word "community" is not simply a web of social arrangements, but rather, "a goal, something in process, something to be achieved" (p. 132). My opportunity to observe and participate within Sarah's classroom, particularly during November and December 1996, provided me with an authentic glimpse of the process of building community. Sarah was recognizing, as Christensen did, that real community is not simply a veneer of politeness, warmth and harmony that masks or "bandaids" realities such as fear, insecurity and anger that many children face. Instead, Sarah struggled to nurture community by working through even hard realities, while simultaneously never giving up the belief that real community is possible, and that every child is worthy to be a contributor and recipient within it.

November 4, 1996. I arrived in Sarah's classroom at 8:35 AM on Monday, November 4th. As I came through the doorway I saw Sarah drawing listening coupons out of the "Good Listening Coupons" envelope, then announcing who the picnic winners would be for this week. Following this announcement, Sarah greeted me and asked the children if any of them could remember who I was. Evan remembered, explaining that I had visited when the class did legacy boxes; Sarah handed him a listening coupon.

After my introduction, I sat down to observe as Sarah guided her students through a procession of morning activities. Several of these activities were similar to typical opening exercised I had observed in many elementary classrooms. First, Sarah's students selected classroom jobs for the week. Then a little girl, Christy, updated the class calendar and announced "today's date" to the group. After spending several weeks in Sarah's classroom, I learned that the calendar was updated each morning, and that job seletions occurred every Monday. I soon learned, as well, that an additional part of the daily morning routine involved Sarah's greeting the children through the form of a "morning message," which she wrote out on the overheard projector and then read with the children. This morning, however, Sarah announced to the kids that they wouldn't have a *"normal morning message."* Instead, because it was the fresh beginning of a new nine weeks, she wanted to *"go over a few things with you."* Sarah later referred to the class discussion that followed as the *"team cooperation talk."*

The focus of the discussion was two-fold. First, Sarah asked the kids to review the four class expectations or "rules" with her. She specifically asked them, *"What*

116

would be an example of how we do each rule?" First, Sarah modeled a response, by explaining that "Follow all directions," could be carried out by *"giving me five,"* when she signaled for it, meaning that she would hold up five fingers and announce "Give me Five," when she needed the class to give her their attention for an announcement, and they might respond by stopping activity for the moment and looking her way. Following her example, several children illustrated the other rules listed. Ronnie's explanation of "Treat others as you want to be treated," was "Do it as you want them to do it back." When asked to give an example of "Complete all assigned work on time," Meredith said that you should, "Finish at centers," and Evan added that you should, "Bring your homework folder home." Jonathan responded to "Respect teachers, students and all staff" by describing a possible occurrence where the cafeteria staff might make a request of the kids, and the kids would then do as asked. As he finished speaking, Sarah told him that he had also just done something respectful, that he had raised his hand when he wanted to speak. She added that Christy had been respectful, because she had listened while Jonathan talked.

The second half of the morning's discussion focused on what Sarah introduced as *"a good thing we're adding."* She then went on to describe a large yellow poster chart titled "Team Cooperation" which she had hung on the side blackboard earlier that morning. Her description of team cooperation aligned with Mike Rose's (1995) description of a primary grade teacher's classroom in which the teacher "encouraged both individual responsibility and respect for others" (p. 112). Sarah told the kids, *"while everyone is in charge of themselves, I have noticed recently that some people are doing a good job helping their neighbors."* Because of this, they would *"do a new thing called team cooperation."*

Explaining that each team would receive points for working well together, she asked the children for examples of what it might mean to work well together or to cooperate as a team. The group discussed possibilities such as helping a friend pick up sequins off of the floor after working at the puppet center, or helping a teammate spell a word they were having trouble with. As the conversation came to a close, Sarah modeled how the chart would work by writing two plus signs on the space on the chart allotted for team two, mentioning that they received the plusses because all members of the team

117

were looking and listening throughout the explanations.

Finally, she explained that the teams could be set up according to desk groups, which would change over time. At present, Evan was a one person team. Sarah suggested that he could choose to be a team on his own, or that he might want to join up with Alton and Sereita, who were a team of two. Sarah later explained to me that she created desk group assignments based on the requests of the kids. At the beginning of each month she passed out index cards and asked each child to write down who they would like to sit by and work with for the next few weeks. The last time this had occurred, Evan had asked if he could work by himself, and Sarah had agreed to let him do so.

As Sarah asked the teams to move towards the rug area for reading, I looked across the class and noticed that Marcie, a child who had been part of the class in September, was no longer in Sarah's classroom. In addition, a boy I hadn't seen before had joined the group. The name on his desk tag read, "Donald King." I was eager to get to know each one of the children, each personality, within what Vivian Paley (1995) describes as the "community-in-the-making" that a classroom can be. Paley asserts that working toward community requires a teacher's commitment to "figure out, each in her own way, how to care for whatever group of children enters our classroom. We must teach them how to care about themselves and about each other" (p. 114). Sarah's discussion with the children today was evidence that she was seeking to "figure out" how to do just that.

November 6, 1996. After lunch this afternoon, Donald was called to Mr. Dixon's office. When library time came and the class was settled under the librarian's care, Sarah headed for the office as well. Mr. Dixon had told her that Donald's mother needed to speak with her. While Sarah was gone, I worked in Kelly's classroom, wondering about the situation.

Later that day, Sarah talked to me about the events that preceded Donald's visit to the office. Apparently, Donald had gotten up and walked himself to school this morning, because his mother was still sleeping. A woman he didn't know had noticed him walking, dressed in a tank top on a brisk morning, and had offered him a ride to school. He accepted her offer and arrived at Eastside without telling anyone about the incident.

118

Later, however, Donald's mother had come to the school, looking for her son and asking about $50 that she believed he had taken from her purse that morning. When called to the office to see her, Donald admitted that he had taken the money, but that he had lost it on the way to school.

Sarah seemed relieved that Donald had made it to school safely. She also seemed concerned, not only about today's events, but also with Donald's transition into Eastside on the whole. Things had been somewhat rough for Donald all around. Sarah was worried that other students in the class were not extending friendship to Donald, and that he may feel like an outsider within the group. He looked different physically. He was the only child in the class that was from a mixed racial background, and he was the only child that wore glasses. Paley (1992) discusses a concern she has about some of her students, very similar to the concerns that Sarah had for Donald. Paley writes, "I've come to understand that although we all begin school as strangers, some children never learn to feel at home, to feel they really belong. They are not made welcome enough" (p. 103). Sarah wondered about how welcome Donald felt at school.

An additional concern was that, on several occasions, Donald had taken items from the desks of other children: Chip's flashlight, Erin's book, someone's CD. Sarah admitted that she herself struggled with placing trust in Donald, while trying to maintain a safe, fair environment for the group as a whole. She wanted him to feel like a respected, valued member of the class, yet she also wanted him to know that he was personally responsible for respecting his peers as valued members of the class. She hoped that he might come to understand that stealing from them was a violation of this respect.

November 13, 1996. Throughout November and December, my visits fell into a general pattern, consisting of one full day and two partial days every school week. Wednesday, November 13th was one of my full days in Sarah's classroom. I arrived at 8:40 AM, as Sarah was giving out team points, explaining, *"I think I'll go with team five,"* and jotting down plus signs in the fifth team space, presently labeled, "Miami Dolphins." I noted that although there had been only four teams up to this point, there were currently five. Team members had also shifted somewhat. Evan and Anthony were now together, comprising team one. Donald, sitting by himself near the back supply

cabinet, was the new team five. And to team four, which had formerly been made up of three girls, a little girl who was new to the class, Regina, had now been added. Each team had chosen its name, which Sarah had printed on the Team Cooperation chart. The names listed included "Dallas," "Flying Eagle," "Virginia Steelers," "Star Girls," and "Miami Dolphins."

After disseminating team points, Sarah moved quickly to the overhead projector, where she announced to the kids that their morning message would be something unique this morning, and that she wanted to enlist their help to create it. She proceeded to write the word, "WEDNESDAY" in a vertical line down the center of the transparency film and explained that she hoped to build an acrostic with the kids, by asking them to think of things that they would be doing that day that could somehow connect to each letter in the word on the screen. A number of children contributed suggestions such as "Centers" and "Library." Their finished product is represented in Figure 7.

We have centers.
cEnters
math Day
JourNal
P.E. with Mrs. Rhea
Spelling
ReaDing
LibrAry
You will write to pen pals

Figure 7. The "Wednesday" acrostic that Sarah and her students constructed together.

Once the acrostic was created, Sarah asked for volunteers to read the lines of the poem back to the class, and many participated. I noticed that Donald read the first line, and then shifted his attention to a laminated hanging that was posted on the supply cabinet next to him. As the rest of the class continued to read the acrostic, Donald began to remove pieces of putty and tape that were holding the hanging in place, slowly pulling it away from the cabinet door. When the class had finished with the acrostic, Sarah asked that each person take out their reading log; and then walked over to Donald's desk. She handed him a roll of masking tape, asking that he fix the hanging and showing him how

to roll the tape pieces in order to accomplish his task.

As the morning progressed, it came time for the children to move to the rug area, where Sarah would read orally to them. Sarah had mentioned to me that she brought to her teaching a "whole language" perspective. As I regularly observed her teaching, I came to understand her perception of "whole language" to be similar to Mike Rose's description of this "way of seeing" held by several teachers he observed in California. Rose (1995) explains that the teachers he studied believed that, "teachers should create environments in which students are immersed in language and are given numerous opportunities to use it: talking, reading, writing, and taking chances with print, telling a story, responding to a reading, writing with and to others, compiling information on topics of personal interest" (p. 85). While in Sarah's classroom, I observed students participating in all of these activities on multiple occasions.

The class was studying Native Americans, and each piece of literature that Sarah chose was connected in some way to a Native American theme. Today's selection was The Legend of Bluebonnet (1983). Sarah spent time discussing the book and its author with the children, then asked them to share their predictions about the story. After all had shared, she asked, *"When we read, is it bad if our prediction doesn't come true?"* Several children responded, "No." Sarah continued, *"What is a prediction?"* Following their discussion of predictions as guesses, she began to read the book to the children, stopping at various points to ask questions: *"What is a drought like?" "Do the people look healthy?" "What is a Shaman?"*

During the reading, Sarah paused in silence twice and waited, once when Evan and Anthony began whispering, and again when Donald wandered away from the group and got into Meredith's desk. Sarah asked Donald to stop playing in her desk, and he did so, moving to his own desk to sit but not rejoining the group on the rug. Alton also wandered away from the group at one point, moving back and forth several times between the rug area and the sink counter. Sarah didn't say anything to him. A few minutes later, Chip got up and walked a few steps away from the rug area. Sarah promptly got his attention and signaled towards the rug. He sat down. I was initially puzzled by Sarah's different ways of handling each child's wanderings. She later explained to me, *"At that point I was kind of picking my battles with Alton. (Some*

offenses) *weren't as big a deal for him as hitting . . . they weren't his biggest issues at that point."* As an observer in Sarah's classroom, I soon learned that Alton's wanderings during reading time were, in fact, infrequent. On most occasions, he sat focused on the pictures, listening intently to Sarah as she read.

Donald's wanderings during class activities, however, were becoming a pattern. Sarah expressed to me her concern that this may interfere with his learning. I had noticed, as she had, that Donald walked away from reading and discussions on the rug often. One day during the previous week, in the midst of a class discussion, Sarah had looked my way and asked, *"Where's Donald? Did he wander down the hall?"* A few minutes later, I had found him, sitting on the floor of the boys' bathroom down the hallway.

That particular day Sarah had talked to Mr. Dixon about her concerns, and he had asked Donald to spend the remainder of the morning with him. Donald had rejoined the group at lunch, after telling Mr. Dixon that he now wanted to participate in class. Mr. Dixon had explained to him that there was one rule he needed to abide by in Sarah's room in order to learn, and that was, "You may not get out of your seat." During teaching time, I had occasionally heard Sarah remind Donald, *"Remember Mr. Dixon's rule."* She consistently held to the premise that it was each child's responsibility to learn, and that belief included Donald. Mike Rose (1995) quotes third grade teacher Elena Castro, who stated to her students, "This is *your* education. It's your responsibility. I'm here to support you, but you have to do the work" (p. 89). Sarah told Donald, *"Learning is your job."* Along with that expectation, she also provided him with support.

Sarah explained to me that in examining Donald's school records, she had noticed that they listed him as having an auditory processing learning disability, as well as attention deficit disorder, for which he took medication. Ironically, although Sarah frequently emphasized to me her opposition to "labeling" children, she seemed to pay attention to these "labels" in Donald's records. Although at face value her attention to this seemed peculiarly inconsistent with Sarah's daily interactions with and discussion about her kids, at a deeper level I believe that Sarah's consideration of these labels was consistent with her overall purpose concerning finding ways to help all children see themselves as positive contributors within the classroom community.

Sarah admitted openly to me that she was struggling in her efforts to help Donald see himself as a positive community member. Despite the encouraging words, invitations to participate and consistent structure that she made a great deal of effort to try to provide for him, Donald persisted in wandering away during class time, and he seemed to distance himself from Sarah and his classmates. Sarah sought to counsel of her trusted friend and fellow educator, Anne Martin, as she had done when seeking to support Evan and Alton with the "contract" plans earlier in the fall. After consulting with Anne, Sarah decided that she might support Donald by providing him with a regular, physical signal that would let him know that she noticed and appreciated his efforts to participate and attend. Sarah also discussed her work with Donald openly with John Dixon. John provided Sarah with an article by Fouse and Morrison (1997), who write that, "Children with attention deficit disorder may begin to think that there is no point in trying because their efforts rarely seem to make a difference. They perceive themselves as inadequate" (p. 442). Sarah wanted to send the message that Donald's good efforts did make a difference. Rather than developing a contract system, as she had done with Evan and Alton, Sarah brought in a narrow glass jar and a bag full of marbles. When Donald listened as Sarah read to the class, answered questions during a class discussion, or read on his own during independent reading time, Sarah placed a marble or two in his jar, dropping them so that there was a noticeable noise when the marble landed.

Donald was one of two new children in the classroom that I was introduced to during mid-November. Regina, a sweet, energetic African American child with a huge smile, was the other. November 13th was her second day at Eastside, and she was to be a picnic guest that day, invited by Vincent, who told us that she was his cousin. In our picnic lunch conversation, Regina told Sarah and me that she wanted to explain how she and Vincent were cousins. She described how recently her dad had started hitting her mom, who was pregnant, and knocked her into the bathtub. Her uncle came to the home and picked up Regina, taking her away to her auntie's house and telling her that she didn't need to be there. While living with her auntie and uncle she attended a church with them, where she had met and gotten to know Vincent, whose family was also close to her auntie and uncle. She described her story matter-of-factly, then went on to enjoy the picnic lunch, teasing with Sarah, and giggling with Vincent. Thinking about this

conversation later, I reflected on the words of teacher Jolly Encisco, whom Mike Rose (1995) interviewed. Jolly stated about her students, "These kids don't even know how strong they are. These kids. That's the reality here" (p. 59). Regina, who was exposed to violent disputes, but came to school with a bright smile. Donald, who dressed himself and started walking to school without adult assistance. These kids were strong.

<u>November 15, 1996</u>. William Ayers (1993) writes that the environment within his classroom is a "living thing . . . It changes every day, every hour, and it can be unpredictable, strange, idiosyncratic" (p. 64). The more time I spent in Sarah's classroom, the more I grasped the reality of his statement. On any given day, the actions and occurrences within the living space of her classroom surprised me.

This morning, I observed three instances which suggested the benefits of focusing on team cooperation. First, during morning announcements, Sarah stated, *"I want to do a little bragging on the Dallas team. The lunch lady came up yesterday and said that Evan and Anthony were fabulous. If someone notices and tells me like that, definitely a chance for extra points for your team."* Sarah had mentioned to me that Anthony and Evan had worked impressively well together. About a week before, Evan had approached her asking whether or not the two might team together. She described her thoughts at his request, *"What am I, crazy!! But, well, maybe they can handle it . . . and if anyone is going to influence Anthony, it's going to be Evan, I'm positive."* Sarah let them give it a try, and so far their influence upon each other had been positive. Anthony provided Evan with the opportunity to work with another person for constructive purposes. And Evan provided Anthony with strong encouragement to cooperate in class. Sarah described an episode that involved the two boys:

> *"When Anthony was on the girls' team, they could say, 'Anthony, get in your seat," and he would ignore them. But I watched Evan this morning. Anthony's up here just kind of talking away* (during a time when they were supposed to be at their desks and ready for class to begin)*, and they didn't get a point. Evan turned to him and said, 'We didn't get a point because of you. I'm in my seat. Sit down. Be quiet.' And he did it. And, for Evan, that was good. He didn't slug him, so that was good!"*

Chip was another child who had responded well to his team's encouragement on several occasions. For Chip, mornings were generally difficult. Sarah explained, *"Mornings are not his time. He's on a type of medication, and his mother says mornings*

at home are terrible. Then he gets here and usually settles down after the first hour."
His first hour at school, however, was often characterized by crankiness, agitation and a lack of focus. Chip's teammates, Christy, Regina, Erin and Meredith, had been working with him through his rough hour in a mothering fashion, reiterating directions and giving him a sort of "patient guidance." This morning they told him, "Chip, you need to get your handwriting book out" when he disregarded an initial direction from Sarah. Chip complied and soon pulled out of his funk for the day. Sarah told me that she wanted to talk with the kids about what to do if a teammate doesn't respond to their suggestions, explaining, *"He's not always listening, so we need to talk about, you know, if you help nicely and someone still chooses not to listen, then maybe you can give a little signal. And then just leave them alone and see if they'll start to join in. That's different from yelling, you know, 'You need to sit down! Get your head right again!' So, we might work on that."*

I observed evidence of cooperation for the third time today during Independent Reading Time, which occurred just after Sarah read aloud to the class each morning. During this time period, which lasted about fifteen minutes, Sarah encouraged children to read something of their choice selected from the wide range of materials available. They could settle down anywhere in the classroom, which usually included space on the rug, under tables, and on large pillows arranged on the floor. Each person could read alone or with a partner. Sarah described for me what she hoped the children could gain from this experience:

> *"Sometimes they pick a book they can really read. And if they want to read to preschool, they have to practice in order to read it. Sometimes they'll pick a book that I've read to them. Every day I read one, someone will come up and say, 'Can I use that one?' Which is good, and they may not be able to read it themselves, but at least they're looking at it, and they're interested in it. This was new for a lot of the kids to have reading time, and I'm trying to get them to think of themselves as readers and to enjoy reading and to get used to different books and enjoy different books."*

Having read with several children during this time period, I realized that some read confidently and fluently, while others hesitated more. I had learned that Erin loved to look at illustrations and photographs, but was reluctant to read text. Today's reading

time turned out to be a positive experience with text for her. Together, Regina and Erin asked if I could read a book with them, and I agreed. They chose A Kitten is Born, because both girls were very interested in animals and this book included wonderful photographs of kittens and a mother cat. The girls suggested a reading strategy which involved each of us taking turns reading the pages, and we followed this pattern throughout the book. Regina read fluently and expressively with little trouble, and Erin took her turns without reluctance. She seemed very excited about the book, and even though she had some difficulty with the words, she did not seem frustrated when Regina would assist her occasionally. At the end of the reading period, when Sarah asked who might want to volunteer to read to the preschool children, Erin said that she wanted to do so if she and Regina could read the book together. Sarah commended this idea, and the girls reserved A Kitten is Born for this purpose.

Overall, this morning was positive and encouraging. One incident, however, brought me back to Ayers' description of the classroom as a space for the unpredictable and idiosyncratic. Alton had settled into school life remarkably well over the past several weeks. Just two days before, Sarah had shown me cartoons he had drawn, complete with speech bubbles, during Inquiry time. His work was genuinely impressive, and both Sarah and I had commented on his artistic talents. Sarah remarked of Alton, *"While he's certainly not perfect, there's so much progress. He might briefly kick his desk or push . . . but never the violence, the total lack of control."* Given his progress, the events during a class discussion this morning came as a surprise.

Sarah was guiding the class through a consideration of Native American symbols which were part of a story summary for The Legend of Bluebonnet (1983). The symbols were posted on the rolling chart, which had been moved to the rug area. While going over the chart, Alton, who was seated near it, began to punch the chart paper. Sarah did not address his actions at first, but instead continued to focus on the discussion, attempting to draw each of the children into it by asking them to read, comment on, or ask questions. After a few minutes though, Alton stopped punching and, instead, began to rip the chart paper from the tablet that held it in place. At this, Sarah asked, *"Alton, would you go back to your seat?"* Alton seemed to contemplate this for a few seconds, then, looking directly at Sarah's eyes, told her, "No." Sarah then explained to him that he

had a choice, stating, *"You are taking away from us, ruining the story. You may either go back to your chair or go to the office. Make a choice at the count of three."* Sarah counted slowly to three. Alton remained seated, looking quite determined. Finally, Sarah told him, *"I'm sorry you made that choice."* She then directed Erin, *"Go to the office and ask Mr. Dixon to step down."* Mr. Dixon arrived shortly and asked Alton to walk to the office with him, which he did, with an angry expression on his face. A few minutes later they returned, and Mr. Dixon waited as Alton went to his desk and retrieved his bookbag and some schoolwork. Alton was noticeably upset at this point, slamming his chair and bookbag as they left.

Later that day, Sarah described to me what occurred shortly afterwards.

"I had told John that maybe Alton just needed a little cool down, time to calm down and think about what choice he would like to make. But out in the hallway, Alton stopped. He stopped his legs. And John told him, "We're starting to move now," and then Alton hit him. After that he sat down in a little room in the office area and John left him saying, 'I want you to think a while, calm down. I'll be right next door.' Alton came back a couple of minutes later and said, 'Mr. Dixon, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have hit you.' And John said, 'I know you're sorry, but you can't hit. When you hit someone you go home.'"

Alton was to be suspended from school for one day.

November 18, 1996. After school this afternoon, I was able to interview Sarah to catch up on events and interactions that I had missed over the past several weeks. We talked at length about her conferences with parents earlier this month. Her approach to working with parents reminded me of Vivian Paley's (1995) considerations about the importance of "encouraging dialog" with parents (p. 140). Linda Christensen (1994b) adds to this, asserting that, "Parents know their child's history in schools and can give important insights" (p. 57). Sarah explained that she not only strongly desired insights from and partnership with parents in supporting the children in her classroom, but also that she actively invited and pursued these possibilities. Sarah described the conferences for me: *"I always like parents to ask any questions or make any comments or share any concerns they have first. Because I think that's the most important, and I don't want to run out of time for that."* This year, the parents' comments were encouraging to Sarah. She specifically described for me encounters with the parents of Jonathan, Erin, Evan and

127

Anthony, representing four of the eight families who attended the conferences.

Jonathan's parents were positive about how challenged their son was within a "regular" classroom. They explained that in first grade, he had been taken out of the classroom for a "pull-out" program for gifted children, but had not liked it. Sarah gave an account of what Jonathan's mother told her, "This is the first year he's been challenged. Last year when he was in that pull out thing he hated it because he thought he was being punished. He came back to the room and had to make up the homework or whatever he missed . . . I always thought that a child should be able to be challenged in the classroom. (This year) he's doing his own books and chooses his spelling words, and he's excited about school."

Erin's mother was also pleased with her daughter's progress this school year. Sarah explained that Erin *"had been very unsuccessful in first grade, to the point that she almost failed. She had all Ds and Fs on her report card on the year average at the end, and the teacher wanted to retain her. Her mother wouldn't let her."* At this month's conference, Erin's mother told Sarah, "Already Erin feels more successful." Sarah described their interactions during the conference:

> *"I said, 'She's gonna bloom this year. She's gonna read.' We looked at several samples of her writing, about how in the beginning of the year it was real hard to pick up more than a few words of what she was saying. Now, I can read almost all of what she's saying, because she's spelling phonetically. She's thinking. She's getting the whole sentence in. And you can see where she's going. She's gone down to read to preschool two or three times, and I think that has helped a lot."*

As Sarah described to me her work with Erin, Ronnie and Sereita, all of whom came in labeled with reading "problems," I was consistently impressed by how Sarah framed her descriptions of these children in terms of possibility rather than deficiency. Mike Rose (1995) quotes teacher Yvonne Hutchinson, whose words remind me of Sarah's way of seeing children: "We get so busy looking at children in terms of labels that we fail to look for the *potential* - and to demand that kids live up to that potential . . . Children can tell right off those people who believe in them and those who patronize them" (p. 17). Sarah's belief in Erin, Ronnie and Sereita as blossoming readers and writers was quite apparent to me. Actually, Sarah's belief in all of her students was clear - and for each one she held expectations for growth in areas where past teachers

reportedly anticipated continuing problems.

Evan's mother told Sarah outright that she was not happy with last year's teacher. Sarah told me, *"Sometimes you hear that, and I just kind of dodged that statement . . . and she said, 'You know, you're different as night and day from last year's teacher,' and I said, 'Well, I hope for Evan's sake that that will be a good thing,' and she said, 'Oh, I think it will.'"* This was the first time during Evan's schooling that his mother had ever come to a parent teacher conference. Sarah described for me how she had tried to open communication and build a partnership with Evan's mother, as well as with Anthony's, early on in the school year, by using "postcards" to keep them updated. Sarah explained, *"I called their mothers and said, 'I'm calling to ask for your help.' I told Evan's mother, 'He cares so much about what your opinion is, and he will say, 'Oh, my mother's going to be proud,' or 'Oh, my mother's going to be mad at that.'"* As a result of the phone calls, both mothers and Sarah worked together through use of a postcard system, which allowed Sarah to keep them posted on their sons' progress and invited their continuing support at home and their feedback. Sarah described the purpose of the system, *"I'm sending a postcard home every Friday. And it maybe has good news, we hope, or bad news. The hope is to encourage their thinking about their behavior ahead of time."*

For Anthony's mother, this parent teacher conference with Sarah was also the first she had attended since Anthony started school. Sarah mentioned that when she had initially phoned Anthony's mother earlier that year, his mother had been somewhat on guard. Sarah described, *"Immediately, Anthony's mother was defensive, immediately. I did not call and say, 'You're doing something wrong,' but that's all she's heard."* As with Evan, the postcard system had had an evident impact upon his class behavior. Sarah described an occurrence the week before when Anthony made a crude remark during class. She related, *"I said to him, 'Do you think your mother's going to want to hear about that?' And he went, 'And you would write it on there!' And I thought, 'Well, good, maybe he's realized that, 'Yes, I will.'"* After that occurred, I did not hear Anthony make any more inappropriate remarks for the remainder of the day.

As Sarah and I concluded our conversation about the parent teacher conferences, as well as the growth of the children in general, I commented that her ability to keep up with a variety of support plans for individual children was remarkable and must be

challenging for her. She responded, *"It's a little hard to keep track of. I've got Donald on one system, Alton on another, and Evan on another . . .* (but) *I think we're making progress!"* Sarah maintained the contracts, marble jar, and postcards, in addition to team cooperation points and listening coupons for all of the children, as well as regular messages and notes of encouragement which I often saw taped to the message board for different children or placed on their desks at the start of the day. Ayers (1993) writes that, "There is no best approach for all children at all times . . . effective teachers need every technique at their fingertips in order to invent the best approach for each particular child" (p. 107). As Ayers describes, Sarah actively sought, experimented with and acted upon a wide range of positive approaches - continually.

November 20, 1996. In Vivian Paley's work, White Teacher (1979), she describes a classroom scene in which a young boy angrily remarked to her, "DON'T TALK TO ME. I don't have to listen to no white lady . . . Don't nobody white look at me. Don't talk to me. You stink!" (p. 13). Throughout her book, Paley writes of her personal journey as a white teacher of African American children, learning that color does matter, and that to ignore considerations of color is to ignore children. In Sarah's classroom, she recognized similar things. Six of her thirteen students were African American. Of these children, Anthony was probably the most vocal about issues of race. Today in class he became angry during an activity when he wasn't called on to answer the specific question he wanted to respond to. His first reaction was to slam his hand onto his desk and throw his hat onto the floor. As the activity continued, even after Sarah provided him with an opportunity to answer a question, Anthony began to angrily mutter comments under his breath and scowl at Sarah. At one point Sarah bent down near him and talked to him quietly for a few seconds. As she got up and walked away, Anthony told her, "You gonna move my clip down anyway." Sarah told him, *"You make the choice."* Anthony answered, "You only like the white people." He then remarked to Chip, sitting nearby, "Chip, you can try to act all cool. You ugly." When Sarah subsequently moved Anthony's clip down, he told her, "I hate you." He then proceeded to write a note that stated, "I hate you," put Sarah's name on the outside of the note, and taped it to the class message board. I was amazed at Sarah's composure throughout this incident. Even as Anthony worte the note, she did not respond to him in anger. She simply moved his clip

down and continued with the lesson, encouraging Anthony to participate.

Kindergarten teacher, Rita Tenorio (1994), writes that she has encountered similar interactions "where children put each other down or where children reflect the discrimination that is so prevalent in our world" (p. 24). She adds that the beliefs and actions of the teacher are central in combating issues of race, emphasizing that a foundation of "trust" is critical. Tenorio writes, "Throughout the twenty years I've worked with children and their families, I've always felt that trust was a key component to success . . . I've come to understand that feeling 'safe' in school includes the students knowing that the teacher understands and respects their experiences and background" (p. 24). Sarah's actions and words amongst her students showed that she was continually trying to extend to them respect and understanding. She seemed to be conveying to her kids that she liked them, period, even during their worst moments. But she was white, and this mattered to Anthony. I wondered how much space existed for him to sense that her trust was "safe."

November 22, 1996. Another episode with the idiosyncratic! As Christensen (1994a) writes, "the steps we take toward reaching the goal of 'community' are not often in a straight path" (p. 55). In a three steps forward, two steps back fashion, Sarah acknowledged that each of the children in her class was growing - at their own pace, with their individual sets of ups and downs. Today was a day of surprises. It began with Anthony, whose week had been a series of struggles to this point. But this morning, his good behaviors seemed to build on one another. During morning message he listened and participated, and Sarah told him he was being wonderful and gave him a coupon. During independent reading time he was first in line to read with Sarah. When setting up for journal sharing, Sarah complimented Anthony for having his journal out and ready, and for sharing his journal responses voluntarily. Then later that morning, he left a note on the message board as he had done the Wednesday before. This time the note read, "I know I said I hate you, but I really love you." Anthony's actions remind me of a statement by William Ayers (1993), who writes that the story of a child's growth and development is "always incomplete because it is always fluid, always changing" (p. 33). He continues, "Whatever truths we discover are contingent; our facts are tentative. This is because we are interested in children - living, breathing, squirming, growing, moving,

messy, idiosyncratic children. Just when we have gained some worthwhile insight, just when we have captured some interesting essence, the children change, the kaleidoscope turns, and we must look again, even more deeply" (p. 33).

On this particular day, a "kaleidoscope" perception of Evan's experiences was shifting regularly. His morning at home had apparently been rough, because he entered the classroom by notifying Sarah that his mom had yelled at him, saying, "It's a terrible day." Across the course of the morning, he seemed both agitated and hungry for attention. By the time that Music time arrived, Evan was noticeably keyed up. He and the Music teacher, Mrs. Beyer, had a history of negative dealings with each other. As Sarah began to walk the children down the hall toward the Music room, he hung back in the classroom, telling me, "I hate music." I told him, "I know you do, but we have to go anyway." And on we went. Sarah stood at the music room door watching the children sit down. As Evan approached, she looked at him a bit compassionately, then holding his shoulders, she gently moved him towards his spot. We had returned to her classroom for just a few moments when Evan rejoined us, having already experienced difficulties with Mrs. Beyer. He was visibly angry as he told Sarah, "She's mean. I hate music. She hates me." Sarah attempted to help Evan settle down, asking him if he would like to draw with her markers in an effort to calm himself. I later realized that she was trying to help him develop a strategy that he might use when he sensed a need to. Sarah then talked to Mrs. Beyer, who stated that she didn't want Evan in her class today because he was distracting others. Following their conversation, Sarah confided to me, *I have a sneaking feeling that she really does not like Evan, and that he can tell that."* Evan's clip was moved down, a result of the choices he had made in music class. Along with this, however, Sarah emphasized to him the need to build a positive relationship with the music teacher. At Sarah's request, Mrs. Beyer agreed to eat lunch with Evan and Sarah during the coming week, and Sarah told Evan about this arrangement.

Donald was another child whose experiences today revealed new shifts and bends in the growing story of who he was. All day long, he made noticeable efforts to participate and focus. When the class took turns reading and responding to Sarah's morning message, Donald volunteered. During reading time, he started off by coloring at his desk, but soon joined the group on the rug to listen to Sarah. During journal response

time he shared his entry. And when it came time to work on puppets, Donald created not one, but five. When I offered to help him, he told me that he wanted Sarah's help specifically. Then he waited for her - at his desk - without a wander. At dismissal time, one of the children, Meredith, found her M and M Counting Book missing and looked to Sarah, assuming that Donald must have taken it. She began, "Now what will I read to the kindergartners? My mom is going to be so mad. Donald . . . " She stopped, however, when Sarah told her, "We don't accuse a person when we don't know what happened." When the children had gone for the day, Sarah asked me if I had noticed anything different that she was doing with Donald today, explaining that it was probably subtle. Of course I had noticed the clinking of the marbles in his glass jar, but had not perceived any other differences. Sarah explained that she had thought long and hard about how Donald must feel within this classroom. She believed that many of the kids considered him hard to love because he often stole things, and he was positioned in this class as different. She told me that she was making a conscious effort to show Donald love through hugs and kisses and positive feedback. Once she explained this, I did recall her stopping by Donald's desk today to talk with him. There had also been a note from Sarah waiting for him on the message board when he arrived this morning.

Ayers (1993) writes that "Teaching is primarily a matter of love. The rest is, at best, ornamentation, nice to look at but not of the essence" (p. 18). I sensed that Sarah was trying, as Ayers suggests, to work on the essence of her relationship with Donald rather than the ornamental. I wondered if any other teacher had sought to establish this foundation with Donald before. I suspected that no one had.

December 2, 1996. Thanksgiving came and went. When I rejoined the students on Monday, December 2nd, I entered the classroom to the sounds of banter and laughter. Mike Rose describes teacher Rick Takagaki who relates well to his students, "moving in and out, listening, laughing and throwing it back" during the free times of a school day - early morning, lunch time and late afternoon (p. 50). Sarah was remarkable in this capacity. She noticed new haircuts, tickled and teased, and loved to "talk football." An avid fan of the Washington Redskins, Sarah developed an ongoing good-natured banter with several of her students who were loyal to the Dallas Cowboys, Evan and Chip in particular. This morning I overheard their teasing and glanced at the message board, on

which a "Dallas wun" sign had been posted by Evan each Monday in recent weeks (See Figure 8). In talking football, Sarah seemed to have found a place to connect with Evan.

As I observed today, I noticed that the direction of the class seemed to be shifting, even if subtly. The children were taking more initiative as "teachers" across the course of the day. Whether or not this was a new occurrence I wasn't sure; this was the first time, however, that I had perceived it.

Sarah established the direction by providing explicit opportunities for the children to teach one another. Early in the day, the discussion focused upon a new "rule" that the class had constructed during the week before Thanksgiving, when two class members had been absent. Sarah addressed the class concerning this "rule" and its connection to the "cool down" table that had been introduced to the group, stating, *"We need to tell Erin and Alton our new rule, because we have a new little table up. Who will describe it?"* Christy volunteered to explain the process, constructing and describing an example in which Ronnie might interrupt the class with a temper tantrum, then be signaled to take a five minute cool down period at the table. Sarah acknowledged Christy's explanation as correct and then built on it, focusing on the need for the new policy, *"We decided that temper tantrums are an interruption, and that's not fair."*

Figure 8. The message board frequently held announcements that the children
            constructed, including this "Dallas Wun" sign.

Later in the morning, I observed a class discussion during which several children

built upon the comments of their peers, much like Sarah had built upon Christy's description earlier.   The kids were responding to a question that Sarah had posed concerning buffalo hunting. Evan answered first, then Sarah called on Jonathan. His comment began with, "I was going to say what Evan said, but also . . . " Sarah commended him, remarking, *"Good. And I like how you agreed with Evan."* Several other children took turns responding, including Christy. Her comment followed Chip's, beginning, "Some I agree with him, but . . . " The children were listening to and thining about the ideas their peers held. Teacher Erin Roche (1996) writes of his conception of community, including in his explanation the notion of a space where students encourage and respect each other (p. 32). Sarah's students were making small steps toward living within this kind of space. Sarah modeled this daily by listening to and commenting on the value in children's statements. Teacher Linda Rief (1992) writes, "I want them (her students) to know they have important things to say and unique ways of saying them. I want them to know their voices are valued" (p. 4). Sarah's actions showed that she wanted this as well.

December 9, 1996. Bob Peterson (1994) writes, "If a teacher wants to build a community of learners, a number of things have to happen" (p. 34). The first requirement that he then lists is the need for students to be involved in making decisions. Observing on this day provided me with an opportunity to witness Sarah's students as they took part in the decision making process that Peterson mentions. The first instance of decision making that I noticed involved the selection of names for newly formed teams of students. The desks had been moved around, and teams one, two, and three had quickly settled on "Chicago Bulls," "Dallas Cowboys," and "Salem Avalanche," respectively, as names for their groups. Team four, however, which included Meredith, Regina, Ronnie, Sereita and Erin, took several minutes to negotiate the name they would choose.

Eventually, Sarah asked, *"Team four, have you come up with a name yet?"* Meredith responded back to her, "We can't decide. Every name we come up with we like, but Ronnie says no." Sarah continued, *"What are your choices?"* Meredith again, "We wanted Christmas Girls and Christmas Boy, but Ronnie doesn't want it." Sarah then spoke directly to Ronnie, *"Ronnie, what would you like?"* Ronnie responded, "I wanted elves." Sarah then asked the whole group, *"How about Christmas Girls and Elves?"* All

135

of the children nodded, appearing to be satisfied. Sarah demonstrated her understanding that, as Linda Rief (1992) writes, "What works for one student may not work for another" (p. 15). She also supported her students by intervening when their decision making was not going smoothly and by modeling a possible route of negotiation that they may not have considered. Peterson (1994) asserts that teachers need to model what it means to work in groups so that children who have not learned that outside of school will not be disadvantaged (p. 34). Sarah provided this type of a model for group negotiation.

Later in the morning, Sarah introduced to the class the final project which each one would contribute to as they culminated their study of Native Americans. Although the structure of the project was pre-established by Sarah to some degree, there were also specific opportunities for the students to make decisions about its direction and their own roles in carrying it out. Sarah introduced the project by stating, *"For the last two weeks (before Christmas) our class is going to vote and pick out one tribe to study . . . At the end, we're going to make a giant village that looks like this tribe's village would have been. Now, our first job is we have to pick . . . "* Sarah directed the children's attention to the board where the names of each tribe the class had read about or discussed were listed: Muskogee, Ute, Kwakiutz, Comanche, Navajo, Sioux, Tewa, Menomonee, Blackfoot, Hopi. She read the names of each tribe and discussed briefly the characteristics of the tribes that the class had considered to date. Sarah then gave each child a blank index card and asked them to write down the name of the tribe of their choice. When the voting was finished, Sarah calculated the results: Ute - 1, Menomonee - 1, Hopi - 2, Navajo - 1, Tewa - 2, Muskogee - 2, and Comanche - 2. She then circled the names of the four tribes that had each received two votes and handed out new cards to the kids, asking them to, *"All vote for one. Choose a circled one; that's where we're tied."* When the new vote came in, Tewa was the winning tribe, with five votes. As Sarah announced this, some children initially cheered while others groaned. Sarah raised her hand, calling *"Give me five,"* and the kids quickly settled. She then confirmed, *"So the tribe we'll study is the Tewa."* Sarah's call for "five" expressed to the kids one of her expectations of them as voting class members - participation in this voting process involved not only sharing their own votes, but also respecting the votes of others.

Next, Sarah set another task before the kids, that of personally choosing the

specific topics they wanted to study as part of the Tewa project. She had listed a few possible areas of study on the chart, then added to the list as she and the kids discussed what they might like to learn about. Their final list included the following choices: shelter, clothes, food, weapons, games/toys, music, tools, landforms, transportation and animals. Sarah then directed, *"I'll give you a piece of paper. You list the area you want to study and then list three questions that you would like to learn about that area."* Before distributing the paper, Sarah gave a few examples of questions for various areas and also asked the children to provide examples. Just before they began their task, Jonathan asked Sarah if he could pick two areas of study, not just one. Sarah agreed to his request.

Across the development of the Tewa project, as a whole, Sarah framed student choices within a direction that she established. Stevenson and Carr (1993) suggest that instruction designed to create a balance between teacher-directed and student-directed activities can serve students' needs well. They recommend that students be exposed to a variety of possibilities, including 1) activities which teachers determine, "in light of their knowledge about what students need to learn and understand," 2) activities in which students choose from options offered by the teacher, who wants to introduce a range of related possibilities to her students, and 3) activities in which students exercise free choice, having been invited to propose activities and devise plans based on their own interests and inquiries (pp. 31-32). The Tewa project aligned closest with the second form of activity within Stevenson and Carr's configuration. The students' individually chosen "inquiry projects," which they worked on three days each week, more closely matched the free choice description.

December 11, 1996. This afternoon I witnessed the culmination of the first round of "inquiry" for the school year, as well as the beginnings of round number two. As Kelly and Sarah had planned, their students had chosen interest-based studies to pursue early in the semester. Some students had opted to work with others on collective studies, while others had chosen to work individually. Over the course of time, each study had involved the determination of questions which the kids were curious about, immersion in materials relevant to their topic which might help provide answers to their questions and also offer issues and ideas that may be new to them, and the development of a final

137

project which was reflective of what they had learned. In First's and Gray's <u>The Good</u> <u>Common School</u> (1991) they describe a curricular goal in which each child is, "surrounded by real books, important questions, and content that is relevant to his or her life." They go on to explain the basis for in-depth study within a "good common school," writing, "Because projects revolve around their own interests, students work intensively on learning projects. We believe the two most important starting points for learning are children's interests and their personal strengths" (p. 93). The inquiry projects that Sarah and Kelly supervised built upon the interests and strengths of the children, much as First and Gray describe.

Inquiry groups included a mix of children from both Kelly's and Sarah's classrooms, and Sarah was supervisor for six groups during the first inquiry round. After the groups settled into her room this afternoon, Sarah announced that the kids had two jobs today: First, they could hang up and display their completed projects, and second, they could take out a piece of paper and write down a list of items that they were interested in learning about for inquiry round number two.

The projects they had completed this fall were varied and creative. Vincent, working on his own, had written and illustrated a book on surfing. Amy B., Melissa and Regina had drawn up a cooking poster which listed the directions for three recipes. In addition, they had made jello and brownies for their classmates a few days before. Richard, P.J. and Jonathan had created a large doghouse as part of their police dog project, with informative paragraphs posted on the outside of it. In addition, they had put together and painted a stuffed paper police dog. Donald and Carlos had illustrated a series of wrestling moves and had used the computer to write about each one, then displaying their illustrations and captions on an extra long poster. Alton had developed, in great detail, a book of cartoons complete with speech bubble captions. And Meredith, Sereita, Beth and Christy, the "babies" group, had drawn and painted a variety of animals babies, which they had hung to create a mobile.

I learned that each group had presented their projects to classmates over the past couple of days. This had taken place after Sarah modeled a project presentation for them, asking them to critique it and help her come up with a list of good things and bad things to do when presenting your work to others. As the physical products of their studies were

now displayed, the kids were ready to move on to new inquiry projects. Before Christmas break, Sarah and Kelly hoped to find out what the children's new interests were and determine how the next set of groups would be formed, based upon their desires. Over the break, both teachers planned to seek out books, magazines, videotapes, artifacts, and any other materials they could find that would be relevant for the new inquiry groups to study in January.

December 18, 1996. With Christmas break just two days away, the focus at Eastside turned toward gift giving. The school set up its own holiday store, which held a wide variety of items that cost little, but allowed the children to purchase things for their families and friends. Sarah and Kelly involved their students in the creation of a recipe booklet that the children could give to their parents. Each child and teacher had contributed a recipe, which Sarah and Kelly had typed on the computer and printed out. All of the recipe titles had been listed on the board, and the kids had determined category titles for sections of their book, such as "Breakfast" and "Desserts." The children had created covers which had been laminated, and the teachers had made 29 copies of each recipe. The children were now at the point of collating recipes, covers and title pages, and binding them. Sarah, Alton and I were the official recipe distributors, passing out recipes until we were certain that each person had one of everything. It was at this point that Alton realized that copies of his own recipe were missing. Sarah found his original and asked if I could escort Alton to the office to make his copies.

As we walked towards the office, Mr. Dixon passed us in the hallway and greeted Alton. Alton's response was unusual. He told Mr. Dixon, "I want to take a boulder and smash it on my head." Mr. Dixon didn't make a great deal of fuss over Alton's remark, but teased him a little instead. After a minute we were on our way to make the copies.

As the day concluded that afternoon, Sarah mentioned that she needed to talk to me about Alton when the other children left. She later told me that Alton and his brothers were presently unsupervised at home. Apparently, their mother had left for New Jersey a few days before, and no one was staying with her six children. Sarah was uncertain as to whether or not anyone was checking on them or responsible for them during her absence. Alton was the second oldest child in his family; his oldest sibling was a sixth grader. Sarah was visibly concerned. She had talked with Mr. Dixon, and they had arranged for

a school representative to check on the children today. McLaren (1989) writes of his students, "Most of the kids in my class faced hardships I'd never had to imagine coping with" (p. 118). Similar to what McLaren describes, Alton's experiences with coping were far beyond what I could imagine might be reality for a second grader.

December 20, 1996. Today was the final day before Christmas break. Sarah updated me concerning Alton, explaining that he had been absent yesterday and that another Eastside mother had reportedly taken care of him. Today, however, Alton was present. The agenda for the morning involved taking the children in small groups to the Eastside holiday store, to allow the children to purchase gifts that they had viewed yesterday. Sarah asked if I could escort the groups to the store as she worked through morning activities in the classroom. Most of the children acted quite self sufficiently in the store, having brought enough money to pay for the items they had pre-selected the day before. Since Alton had been absent, though, he wandered the store for a while, holding tightly a dollar bill. He told me that he was looking for something for his mom. We sorted through trinkets and pins together, finally coming upon a display of rings. Those with one stone costed $1.25, and those with three stones were $1.75. He tried a three stone ring on his own finger, then put it down and walked around the store a little while longer, gravitating back towards the ring display several times. I told him that I'd be glad to add 75 cents to his funds if he wanted to get the ring. He accepted my offer.

We moved towards the cash register, and he noticed a basket of candy canes that was sitting near the register. He picked one up and was putting it into his pocket when I suggested that he wait to ask the cashier if it was all right to take one. The cashier was friendly and seemed to put Alton at ease. Yes, Alton could keep the candy cane, and would he like her to wrap the ring? What kind of wrapping paper would he like? Alton chose flowered wrapping paper and wrote on the gift card that the cashier offered him, "From Alton." As we were just about to leave, he stopped and turned to the cashier again, holding out the candy cane. He asked if she would wrap it up for him, telling her that he wanted to make sure that he had a present.

We returned to the classroom shortly. The kids had come up with a Merry Christmas word chart, played Christmas bingo, taken spelling tests, gone to centers, and put the final touches on their Tewa project cards. These cards held statements that the

children had written and subsequently typed on the computer as they researched the Tewa "area" of study that they had selected. Today the children were mounting their cards onto construction paper, preparing to display the cards in front of the village that they had created out of paint, boxes, toothpicks and popsicle sticks. Sarah explained that the cards they were making, *"will be like information cards. This will be like a little center on the Tewa tribe for people who want to read about the different areas."* The display was set up on the table in front of the side blackboard (See Figure 9).

Figure 9. The Tewa village display and project cards constructed by Sarah's children.

I had to leave a little bit early today, so I gave out the notes and bookmarks I had gotten for the kids and wished them happy holidays just after lunchtime. The children were gracious and excited, and I felt honored by their many hugs and thank yous. As I left, though, my thoughts were focused on Alton. I wondered whether or not his mother would be there for Christmas to receive his gift. I wondered when he would open his candy cane. Teacher Cynthia Ellwood (1994) writes, "How do students maintain hope if they see the world as troubled and even systematically unfair?" (p. 98) Considering Ellwood's question, I wondered how difficult it was for Alton to maintain hope.

January - February 1997: Roots of Connection

> *"I want to feel strong and healthy, secure, independent, connected as a worthwhile member of a group. When these qualities are nurtured and supplied with opportunity, I can act with surprising courage. I can take criticism, be a good ally to others, face up to my shortcomings and failures, keep going against all odds, experiment in new realms. In other words, my ability to exercise my mind is linked to my emotional state, my feelings, my affect. When they are disregarded, I - like most people - hold back, and the possibility of a productive formal education narrows" (Ayers, 1993, p. 31).*

In the two months that followed Christmas vacation, I observed many demonstrations of "acting with courage" within Sarah's classroom. As an observer during this time period, I witnessed a growing degree of class participation, teamwork and interest in academic learning. For some of the children, their actions suggested that a sense of security and self-worth was becoming internalized. The growth they displayed throughout individual and cooperative work seemed to be anchored by their perceptions of themselves as capable, worthwhile contributors. For others, however, I wondered whether their sense of security and value was dependent upon Sarah's continual nurturing rather than internalized perceptions of self-worth. My interpretations were based upon observations of how the children responded when Sarah was not present. During the winter months, there were several "new teachers" that filled in for Sarah in varying capacities, including a substitute teacher and myself. For many students, responding to another teacher presented little disruption in their abilities and willingness to participate, attend and cooperate. For others, though, Sarah's absence sometimes provoked demonstrations of upheaval and struggle.

McLaren (1989) writes of his third grade class during the month of February, "My class had settled down somewhat. There were still fights, and kids refusing to cooperate, but most of them were getting into better working routines, sometimes teaming up with a partner to investigate items that caught their interest . . . Despite the increased response of the kids, I often wondered how much difference any of this would really make in empowering their lives" (p. 90). McLaren's concerns related to what his children would permanently "own" once they left his classroom. Building on considerations similar to

McLaren's, Sarah also wondered about what each of her students would take with them when they left her room, about what might have been instilled within them. For the most part, Sarah's kids appeared to be slowly but steadily growing stronger, healthier, more secure and independent. For some, these qualities seemed to be secure enough to survive change. For others, however, I wondered whether or not Sarah served as their "connection" to a sense of self-worth. On occasions when their connection to her was removed, their ability to act with courage seemed somewhat shaken. Even for these children, however, there were moments of victory along the way, instances and glimpses of their budding understandings that they could act with courage, that they could be positive contributors within this classroom.

January 5, 1997. School had been in session for two days when I phoned Sarah to see how things were going. She was excited, explaining, *"the kids have had two great days* (of) *quiet hard work."* Alton's mother had returned. Jonathan had written and illustrated a creative ABC book, which he had read to her and to Mr. Dixon, and which Sarah had currently taken home to read to her husband. Evan had broken up a fight between two boys on the playground when several classes were outside playing. Once he had accomplished this, he brought one of the boys over to Sarah, telling her, "This boy needs help." Later Evan had told her, "I'm having a good day today." Sarah described, *"It was kind of a reflection for him. And I looked at him and said, 'Yes you are, but you have a good day every day."* He had responded, "Yeah, I guess I do now." Sarah wondered if the kids were progressing toward one of her "goals," reaffirming that, *"my goal has been to change my kids' opinions of themselves, to think of themselves as good kids, not bad kids."*

Sarah admitted to me that the tone within the classroom had *"absolutely shocked"* her. She described, *"I came back thinking, 'Oh, they've been home for two weeks, you know, we're going to have to go all the way back* (to the beginning).*' But they were wonderful! I just thought, 'Wow, this is amazing!'* Sarah talked to her husband and to John Dixon about her sense of surprise. Her husband responded, "They've been coming to this point all along . . . it's just now showing so much." Sarah mentioned that when she described her excitement to John Dixon, *"he laughed, and he said, 'It didn't happen over New Year's. It's just the accumulation, your consistency staying with them, starting*

143

to take hold. You're trying to change behaviors they've had all their lives, but it's starting to take hold.'" Sarah told me that she anticipated there would still be days when struggles resurfaced but that during those times, she hoped to remind herself of the children's overall growth. She explained, *"I'll keep this as a mantra in my mind . . . to take a step back and look at all the good things they've done and remember how far they've come since the beginning. And even though they'll have days where they may slide, they're still not going to slide back to where they were in September."*

January 7, 1997. School had been in session for almost a week, and Sarah's students continued to cooperate and work hard academically. Jonathan read his ABC book to me, and I was impressed by his creative use of language, constructing phrases like this one on the "H" page, "Hairy Howard hit a high-flying hockey puck - HARD!" He told me that Mr. Dixon had laughed outloud when he read it and that Sarah had left a note on the message board which said that her husband David loved it, particularly because Jonathan had created the "D" page using David's name.

I learned that the class had now moved from their focus on Native Americans into a study of China. For the past week, Sarah had been using stories from China and informational books about the country during her morning read-aloud time. In addition, these books and a wide range of related resources were sitting in the blackboard chalk trays around the classroom, for the children to use during independent reading time. Today I was impressed by the knowledge about China that the kids had acquired in so little time. Before viewing a movie about China, Sarah had asked the class, *"Who can give us a fact about China that we've been talking about to start us off before we go to the movie?"* Christy had offered, "China has a special parade at the New Year," and Ronnie had added that this parade was a "dragon" parade. Jonathan commented, "China is halfway around the world from us." Vincent stated that, "Men from China sailed to America 150 years ago," and Erin added to his statement, explaining that this occurred, "because they wanted gold." Alton explained, "There is a huge New Year's feast," and Meredith had provided the Chinese expression for Happy New Year, "Gung Hay Fat Choy!" Ronnie said that the Chinese people, "hang banners for good luck." When Sarah asked him what color the banners were, he told her that they were, "red." And Jonathan explained that, "The Chinese came after the Pilgrims and Native Americans were in

America." As each child provided a fact, Sarah wrote them down on chart paper. She frequently constructed charts such as this one with her kids and displayed them in the room as evidence of class ideas and knowledge (See Figure 10).

When Sarah asked the students to take a break for lunch, not all of them lined up to go to the cafeteria, and I remembered that she had told the group earlier, *"I need to have a meeting today in the room with Ronnie, Meredith, Chip, Erin and Jonathan at lunch time."* As the rest of the class walked down the hallway towards the lunchroom, Ronnie, Meredith, Erin and Chip, who had all packed lunch boxes, stayed in the room with me. Sarah explained that she and Jonathan would be back shortly with their lunch trays.
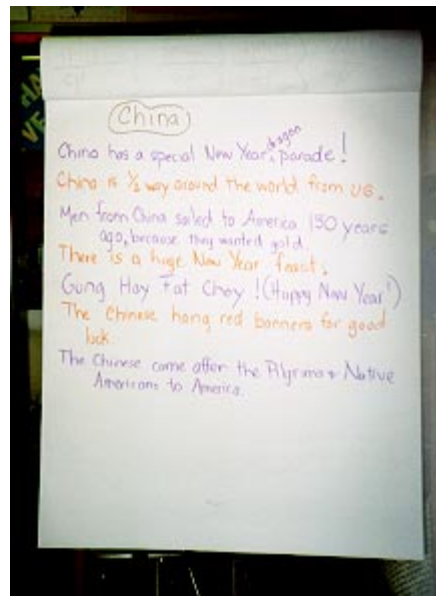

Figure 10. As the children provided Sarah with information about China, she
displayed their statements on a class chart.

When they returned, Sarah asked all five children to join her on the rug, and they did so. Sarah then asked if Meredith and Ronnie could tell their stories about what happened at lunch yesterday. They explained that they had been teased about "liking each other" by the other three children for nearly the entire lunch period. Both had been upset, embarrassed and had eaten little when Sarah had arrived to pick up the group. After Meredith and Ronnie finished speaking, Sarah asked the three Erin, Chip and

145

Jonathan to speak. Jonathan told her, "I already apologized ten times." Chip and Erin said nothing at first. Sarah then asked about whether or not any of them would like to have someone tease them for thirty minutes, and each one shook their head. She reminded them of the class expectation concerning treating others like you want to be treated, and added that she believed apologies were needed. Chip and Erin both apologized at that point. Interestingly, though, Erin remained facing the back wall the entire time, not wanting to look at anyone directly. Then Jonathan added, "I know what needs to be done. In lunch, Meredith and Ronnie should stay in their regular spots, but me and Erin and Chip should go to the end of the table to eat." Sarah listened to his suggestion and then asked, "Would you like to do that this week maybe? Then next week would it be nice to move back?" Jonathan agreed, as did Erin and Chip. As I reflected on this incident later, I considered teacher Bob Peterson's (1994) recommendation that, "If a teacher wants to build a community of learners, students need to be involved in making decisions" (p. 34). Peterson adds that to support students, "teachers need to be clear about what is and what is not within the purview of student decision making" (p. 34). On this occasion, Sarah clearly conveyed to her students that some decisions were non-negotiable. For instance, student could not choose to ignore the problem, but were required by Sarah to consider it and to apologize. Sarah also provided for student decision making, however, by permitting Jonathan to suggest a consequence. She listened, invited response from the others involved, and then implemented his idea.

January 15, 1997. Today when I arrived, the kids were so engrossed in their books during Independent Reading time that at first I couldn't find Vincent and Regina and assumed they were absent. When Sarah called "five" a few minutes later, though, both emerged from underneath the writing center table, and I realized that they must have been reading there quietly when I had arrived. During the reading time, Sereita and Erin, both emergent readers, had asked if I would listen to them read. Each had obtained a Dr. Seuss book and could read it in its entirety. Erin read through The Foot Book quite fluently, hesitating on only a couple of words. At the end, she looked up at me with a huge smile on her face, extremely pleased with her accomplishment. Sereita followed with Green Eggs and Ham, undaunted by its many pages of text, expressing her words with confidence.

There was a noticeable difference between the Independent Reading time that I viewed today and the occasions in September of which Sarah had said, *"No one had ever asked them to read independently before, and they just thought this was play time."* Mark Hall, a high school teacher, expressed to Mike Rose (1995) concerning students taking interest in their work, "I just love it when the bell rings and nobody moves!" (p. 39). Although there is no official "bell" that rings to signal the end of reading time in Sarah's second grade class, I wondered if Sarah experienced a similar feeling recently when she called "five" and asked her students to put away their books. Donald audibly groaned, "Ohhh," and hit his hand against his desk in apparent frustration as he moved to put his book away.

January 17, 1997. Again today I was impressed by several incidents that occurred. During spelling time, Sarah listed on an overhead transparency several words that included mechanical errors in spelling and capitalization. The kids were to locate the mistakes and raise their hands to be called on. At one point, many children were moaning to have a turn, with their hands stretched as high as they could manage. Mike Rose writes that on one occasion when he was present in a third grade classroom he could *feel* the excitement of young minds working (p. 77). Today, that type of feeling characterized Sarah's room as her kids eagerly participated.

Later, when center time was announced, Sarah introduced Alton as a "teacher" for a new center that would be introduced. She explained to the class, *"Since he is so good at paper folding, Alton has agreed to take three people at his center, and he will teach them how to fold with paper . . . so we have a paper folding center, and we thank Alton for agreeing to be the teacher on that."* Jonathan, Evan and Anthony all chose to work at Alton's center for the morning. I was impressed both by Sarah's emphasis upon Alton's role as a knowledgeable leader and by Alton's willingness to assume this position.

After school, Sarah told me that she had visited Alton's home last week to tell his mother how well he had done since returning from Christmas break. She described the visit.

> *"She was surprised to see us, and said, 'Come in,' and was very sweet.*
> *Seven kids live there, five are hers and two are cousins, and they all cried,*
> *'Alton, Alton, your teacher's here!' And he came out of the kitchen and*
> *said, 'Mrs. Rhea!' And he came over and gave me a big hug and a kiss in*

front of his mother and all these brothers and sisters. And I, of course,
gave him a hug and a kiss back, and the mother kind of looked and smiled.
And I said, 'I just wanted to stop and tell you how pleased I am with
Alton's improvement.'"

Alton had not been suspended since Christmas. Sarah told me that she believed, though, that dealing with anger was a daily struggle for him. During a conference, Alton's mother had brought up an event that occurred just before the family moved from New Jersey to this area, about a year ago. Alton had been very close to one of his sisters, and had even shared a bed with her, up until she died. His mother confided to Sarah that Alton had been told that she died because he wet the bed. Sarah expressed to me that Alton's belief in himself as a "good kid" had to be fragile, at best. McLaren (1989) writes that Sasha, a student who might have been labeled a "slow learner" in others schools, provided him with a profound consideration one afternoon. He describes their conversation: "This afternoon, while they were helping me clean out the cupboards, I casually remarked that kids today don't seem to really try to get along with each other. 'How do you expect them to get along with other folks,' replied Sasha, 'when they don't even like the person that they are?'" (p. 141). McLaren's student's statement raises an issue that Sarah considered often as she I wondered what it would take for Alton to like the person that he was.

January 22, 1997. Today I learned first hand that it is difficult to replicate the connection that Sarah has built with her students. I also realized that without this connection in place, several of the kids are quickly unsettled. Sarah met with Mr. Dixon for her mid-year conference while the children were in library. When the conference took longer than she expected, she asked if I could pick up the kids from library and then, once back in the classroom, review their Reading Workshop tasks with them and guide them in signing up for today's center choices. She reminded me, as well, to send Evan to read to Kindergarten and Donald to the special teacher he visited at this time each week. Given that my role as researcher involved not only regular observation, but also frequent participation and assistance during class activities (Lincoln, 1996), I felt comfortable about filling in for Sarah. Having observed Sarah accomplish routines such as Center Sign-Up and Reading Workshop on many occasions, I was confident that things would go well.

148

When I arrived at the library, I noticed Evan standing near the doorway ready to read to kindergarten, and I told him to go ahead. In the midst of asking the others to line up, however, I forgot to send Donald to the special teacher. I quickly wished that I had remembered. As we moved towards the classroom, Anthony and Alton began to swing at each other in a way that seemed to borderline between playfulness and anger. I separated the two, asking Alton to lead the line and Anthony to bring up the rear. Alton had only been in place for a few steps, however, when he swung at Donald, missing his face by a hair, but sending his glasses across the hallway floor. After checking on Donald, requesting that Alton stop swinging, and retrieving the glasses, we once again proceeded down the hallway. Reaching the classroom most of the kids took their seats. But Alton began to follow Donald around the perimeter of the room, quickly getting closer to him. I reached the two just steps after Alton caught up and punched Donald solidly. Because Sarah wasn't present, I asked Alton to sit and wait for her and attended to Donald, who seemed dazed more than hurt. By this time, however, Anthony and Vincent announced that they didn't want to sit down. The mood in the classroom began to feel chaotic to me, as I signed up the other children for centers while the two of them meandered around the room.

We eventually got through it, but I found myself unable to maintain practices that Sarah consistently upheld. When it was Ronnie's turn to sign up for centers, for example, he told me, "Not everyone's listening." Instead of asking him to wait for attention, as Sarah often did, I simply told him, "It's OK. You're talking to me, and I'm listening." By the time that Sarah returned, I was relieved that most of the kids were working on their Reading Workshop jobs and that center sign-ups were complete, but then realized that I had completely forgotten to send Donald to the special teacher. I filled Sarah in on the events that had occurred and sat down, relieved to return to the role of observer for a while, more aware than ever of how challenging it must be to maintain a balance between seeing the good in each child and providing a safe environment.

As the afternoon continued, the sense of chaos I had experienced earlier, and had perhaps even contributed to, was difficult for Sarah to settle down. By Math time, interruptions and wanderings seemed to be the norm. McLaren (1989) writes a description of his own teaching experience which seemed to be particularly suited for

149

today, "It would drive anyone a little crazy. At least half the class wandered around the room at any given time, despite my attempts to keep them working quietly at their desks. The constant movement was threatening" (p. 72). I wondered if Sarah felt threatened by the wanderings and interruptions that seemed to characterize days like today.

As Math began, Alton sat down at the computer and Anthony began to look for his pencil. Donald asked to go to the bathroom. Sarah asked the students to proceed to their desks, and they did so. But within a minute or so, Anthony and Alton began grabbing each other's papers. Sarah remained calm, but told the class, *"Alright, five minutes of math time gone . . . I've been ready."* She then added to Anthony and Alton, *"The time you waste now will come out of centers tomorrow."* Finally the lesson began. After a few minutes, Alton began to wander the room again, first to the computer, then to the museum center, then to the globe. Sarah reminded him again, *"What you miss today we take out of center time tomorrow."* His immediate response was, "So?" But shortly he returned to his desk. Ten minutes into the lesson, Evan returned from using the computer in Kelly's classroom. He had been directed to return at the beginning of math, but had not chosen to do so. Upon entering, Sarah told him, *"Ten minutes of math - you'll make it up tomorrow."* He muttered, "I know all this easily." Then as Sarah carried on the math discussion with the class, Evan interjected comments loudly at several points such as, "Oh my God!" and "I can't believe it!" repeatedly. After the first comment or two, Sarah asked him, *"Evan, be quiet."* When he continued, she stopped at his desk and talked to him about being quiet so that others could learn. By the time that math was over, Sarah asked if I could check the kids' homework folders and have them pack, because she and Evan needed to call his mother from the phone at the back of the room to involve her in taking care of the math situation. After school, I wanted to remain and talk to Sarah about the day, but she had to go directly to bus duty and then on to a faculty meeting.

January 23, 1997. This morning the children were working on "mail call" letters when I arrived, writing to friends and teachers in their own classroom as well as others around the school building. Eastside has an old blue mailbox in the hallway, in which kids can drop their letters. In order for the letters to be delivered, by fifth grade mail carriers, the kids have to put each letter in an envelope and print out on the envelope the

correct class addresses for both sender and recipient. They also need to add a "stamp," taken from a roll of small stickers that the fifth graders provide. Each class has a unique address, which is posted on a sheet in the room. Sarah's classroom address is "13 Panther Park, Jungle, VA 45678." A fifth grader that stopped by the room to deliver mail one day reported that Sarah's class was one of the most active in Eastside's mail system.

Sarah maintained a personal policy for letter writing, which she described simply as, *"You write me, I'll write you back!"* She explained to me that she felt strongly about reciprocating their efforts, *"My kids have said, when they write to other people and they don't write them back, 'Why didn't they write back? You always write back, Mrs. Rhea.' So they notice that. That's the correct thing to do, it's a courtesy. And it gives them a reason for why we write, for how fun writing is."* This morning, as mail call time ended and Sarah called the kids back to the rug area, I noticed that Evan, Ronnie, Erin and Vincent remained at their desks, still writing. After waiting briefly, Sarah told them she would count to five and wanted them to come to the rug area, explaining, *"I need all of you here before we can have this class discussion."*

The class discussion that ensued was one that Sarah would later refer to as the "learning time" talk. She began by telling the kids, *"I went home very grumpy yesterday afternoon. There was a lot of fighting, interrupting, people late to things we were doing. We missed a lot of learning time. Every time we have to stop for one of those things, we stop."* Sarah then reviewed the four class expectations with the kids, reminding them that when these basic rules aren't considered, learning time is missed. When directions aren't followed, when work is not completed on time, when others are treated poorly, class learning time suffers. Sarah then showed the kids a black kitchen timer that she had purchased, explained that it could be set for one to sixty minutes, and demonstrated how it worked. She described how she planned to set the timer for a specific amount of minutes each time she gave a direction in the days to come. She then told them, *"Now, I'm going to be real tough on those rules until we get them down. Here's the new plan. If I give a direction and you don't follow it . . . for example, coming to the rug, yesterday after inquiry not returning to class on time, cleaning up after reading . . . If you are not here, you are wasting learning time. If you are not in your seat, on the rug, etc., when the timer bell rings, then you lose center time."*

Sarah then showed the kids a new chart, which she referred to as "the center chart." On it, each child's name was written down on the left margin. Across the top of the chart were five column headings, one for each day of the week. Sarah created student examples to explain how the chart would work, asking Sereita whether or not she minded being used as the first example. *"Sereita, may I use your name?* (Sereita agreed). *For example, if today Sereita was not ready for Reading time, and the bell dinged, then I would write in an X on Thursday across from Sereita's name and put 'Reading' beside it. Then during center time, Sereita would do her Reading work that day."* Finally, Sarah expressed to the students that she did not want them to see this as a punishment, but rather as a chance to make up the learning they had missed. She told them, *"Now the reason for that - it's not a punishment. You need to make up learning time. And center time is when we have a choice. Learning is not an option. You have no choice there."*

As the discussion came to a close, Sarah emphasized a final point. *"We had five people yesterday who hurt other people. They hit, shoved, kicked. No one should be in my classroom if they hurt someone. No one deserves to be hurt. If anyone does that, their Fun Friday is gone."* Following this statement, Sarah opened the discussion to questions that the kids had, which they went over for several minutes. When each question had been addressed, she announced that the system was officially in effect. Sarah told the kids, *"As I call you to your seats, be there with your reading log. We'll set the timer for one minute."*

Later, Sarah told me that she felt *"meaner than nails"* imposing this system, particularly because Evan, Vincent, Anthony, Chip and Erin all had their names posted on the center chart before lunch time. Regardless, Sarah stuck by the new "plan," maintaining that *"learning is not an option."* Teacher Erin Roche (1996) writes that he struggles concerning how much control to impose in a classroom which he hopes to move in a student-centered direction. He explains:

> "I feel often as if I must pointedly intervene . . . and this means setting hard, clear, and sometimes impersonal parameters and expectations, so students know the acceptable limitations. In other words, I'm looking for some way to create an order within the chaos of democratic learning. Is this possible? Is there such an order? How do I define it? What sort of chaos is valid for students, the community, and me? Do behavioristic rewards and punishments have merit in teaching a child how to develop

common sense? Or am I sacrificing democratic ideals for the authoritarian path of safety and ease?" (p. 37)

Roche's words reminded me of the conversations that Sarah had held with John Dixon at the beginning of the year, during which she had expressed her concerns about whether or not behavior management "systems" were right for her children. At present, when talking to me about the center chart, she didn't raise these issues again. She did mention, however, that she hoped the kids would *"not need to rely on it"* once they internalized the idea that learning time must be respected.

January 24, 1997. As I walked towards the school building at about 8:40 this morning, a car pulled up and Donald stepped out of it. He saw me immediately and shouted, "Hi Mrs. Murrill." Then added, "That's my mom." I waved to his mom, and she waved back, then watched us as we entered the building. Because Donald's mother is in the process of moving her family to another apartment, he is no longer riding the school bus and has recently been late for school frequently.

Although Donald has now been at Eastside for more than three months, it still seems as if his classmates have not fully embraced him as a member of their group. Last week Sarah described to me an instance during which the kids ganged up on Donald one morning. Following the episode, Sarah asked Mrs. Neff, the gym teacher, to keep Donald with her for a little while, so that she could talk to the rest of the class. When Sarah asked the other kids why they picked on Donald, several responses were, "He annoys us," "He bumps into us," and "He steps on us." In addition, he had recently taken items from many of them. Sarah told them, *"Yes, I know. But you all know how to step away if someone is doing that with you. I've seen you do that."* She then added, *"We all need to be extra nice to Donald for a while. He's having a hard time at home right now."* When Meredith asked what was happening at his home, Sarah told her, *"That's private. But we all have a hard time at home sometimes."* Since this conversation, several of the children had made efforts to include Donald. Christy and Jonathan had helped him with his homework and Meredith wrote him a nice note. Along with these efforts, however, there were others who continued to either ignore or make fun of Donald. Paley (1992) writes that, "The rejected children know who they are, whether or not they tell us" (p.15). Sarah believed, as Paley suggests, that the rejections of other

children impacted Donald's sense of himself within this group.

Today I witnessed an interaction in which two children laughed at Donald, and one stood up for him. Amazingly, his "champion" was Alton, the same Alton who had punched him just days earlier. Evan, Vincent, Donald and Alton were my charges for a while during Study Hall today, because they had not earned enough personal points for the week to attend Fun Friday. Sarah had asked them to work quietly at their desks during this time period, supplying them with paper and pencils, and the boys had chosen to draw. As their drawing progressed, Evan drew a picture of a foolish character and wrote Donald's name underneath it. He then showed it to Vincent, and the two began to laugh. When Alton saw the drawing he looked disgusted and told them both, "Quit being mean on Donald." By this time, I had seen the drawing as well, and reminded Evan, "Remember the rule you have, treating others as you would want to be treated." Alton quickly followed up my statement, telling Evan, "Treat Donald like you want to be treated." Donald had not yet seen the picture, but at this point, Evan showed it to him. Donald laughed at it, and when he did so, the others began to laugh at his response. Finally, Vincent scratched out Donald's name at the bottom of the drawing.

Linda Christensen (1994a) writes of her students, "I don't want their first reaction to difference to be laughter or withdrawal. I try to teach them how to empathize with people whose circumstances might differ from theirs. Empathy is key in community building" (p. 53). Sarah's conversation with the kids last week was an effort to guide them towards empathizing with Donald, as Christensen describes. But the presence of guidance in a classroom does not guarantee that students will choose to act as their guide hopes they will.

January 27, 1997. Today was an official "teacher work day" for Valley City Schools, and I had the opportunity to talk with Sarah at length about her perceptions of recent happenings within the class, as well as her hopes for the second half of the school year, which had now begun. Partway into our conversation, Sarah brought up a recent phone conversation with Kelly, her teaching colleague, during which they had talked through a variety of issues which were presently on Sarah's mind. She described the call,

> *"When I got off the phone on Friday, and I looked at the clock, I realized that Kelly and I had talked an hour . . . We went from talking about this year, to talking about John* (Dixon)*, and to talking about next year, and*

different things like that. And when we got off the phone, I felt so much better and so much more, 'Yes, we're on the right track. Yes, we're doing the right thing.' And I thought, this is really helpful, so much, to have another person to do that with."

Sarah referred to both Kelly and John frequently as persons whose support was significant to her. About Kelly she said, *"This is the closest I've worked with somebody. I've had teams before. But I would say that she would be the one . . . just working that closely has had a great influence."* She added that, *"John was so smart to put us together! It just makes a world of difference."* And she described for me a wide range of activities that she and Kelly did together, including planning curriculum, purchasing and borrowing books and supplies that they could share, moving children between their rooms, and checking in to see how the other's day had gone. She stated, *"It's good at the end of the day, just to say, 'How was your day?' And we can complain or we can say, 'Good,' or 'What about this?'"*

Sarah also described her appreciation of John's support:

"I have never had a principal who so believes the way I believe and has a philosophy so much like mine and so supports what we're doing. He's never once said, 'It should be more structured.' Never once. He's backed us on not sending our kids to the gifted thing (pull-out program)*; he thought that was wonderful. He's interested in us looping. It's worth the drive to have a principal that supports you that way! I've never had that in sixteen years. I've had nice principals. I've had principals that were supportive and thought I did a nice job. But I've never had one whose philosophy was so much like mine that when you leave you feel excited and motivated."*

William Ayers (1993) writes, "Outstanding teaching is usually teaching against the grain, and teaching against the grain can best be accomplished with allies. This means supporters, friends, co-conspirators, and comrades. Learning how to find allies and build alliances can be lifesaving" (p. 131). Sarah's statements provided me with a perception of Kelly and John as both supporters and comrades, as Ayers suggests are needed.

Because Sarah had mentioned that John was interested in the possibility of "looping," I asked her to describe the looping concept to me. Grant, Johnson and Richardson (1996) define looping as, "the opportunity for students and a teacher to stay

together for two or more years and share in individual growth and development in all areas" (p. 37). They go on to assert that:

> "there are many benefits from a looping program, but one of the greatest is the additional learning time that occurs because significant time has been saved at the beginning of the second year of each subsequent loop. This is accomplished by not having to repeat routine procedures and practices, reestablish behavior standards and expectations, and develop individual and group responsibility, accountability and independence in the learning environment" (p. 37).

Sarah's description of looping aligned with these definitions. She hoped to teach third grade next year, working with the same group of students that she presently had. She added, *"You send out a letter to the parents in the spring . . . and the way it works is that you give the parents a choice. Some parents will say yes, and some parents may say no. So you'd have the basic core of your group, and then you might gain several others."* Sarah explained that she and Kelly hoped to loop to third grade next year together, telling me, *"We've talked about it, and to keep going what we have, we need to do it together."* She mentioned also, though, that while John was supportive of the looping possibility, there were a number of details that had to be worked out before they could move forward with it. She told me, *"It's still up in the air. John said he'd start thinking about his numbers, and he'll have to meet with the Assistant Superintendent to figure out what his population looks like for next year. Will he need more teachers? Will he need less teachers? And what grades and all that."*

Sarah and I also talked about her plans for the remainder of the current school year. She explained that, in addition to continuing to build a sense of *"community"* amongst her students, she also hoped to work on *"the academic side"* during the second half of the school year. She described,

> *"I want them to continue with more independent reading and writing. I'd like them to become stronger with reading and writing on their own. And I want to do more, I don't know, we still have the book problem - not having enough books - but work in small groups more, reading a book together during reading workshop and then answering questions or responding to the book in some way in their reading log book . . . I would like them by the end of the year, if possible, to be able to read a book on their own and respond in complete sentences in their log. And I'm trying to build more inquiry into the second half. And I'm thinking even next year, we probably won't get this until next year, particularly if we looped,*

instead of having an inquiry period if inquiry would just be a part of everything we did."

Sarah expressed that this year's "free choice inquiry" had served as a needed foundation for her kids, and that with this basis established, she hoped to move towards integrating elements of inquiry into the class curriculum as a whole. She explained,

> *"Doing a special inquiry time has been a good way for them to get into asking questions and wanting to learn about things. I mean, none of them had ever heard of inquiry! And then with* (studying) *China, I don't think that at this age it's bad to be giving them some, maybe three weeks of group exploring activities about China, and then they can go on to pursue things they want to know after they've had some exposure. Because, they didn't know anything about China and if you just said, 'What do you want to learn about it?' they'd say, 'I don't know!' So they're getting a basis, an overview* (first)*. I want to start building inquiry in more, and we need to talk about how we want to do that."*

Sarah frequently framed her considerations of curriculum planning in relation to what she perceived in her students. Her approach was similar to one described by high school teacher and coach, Carlos Jimenez, who stated to Mike Rose (1995) about this work, "You're always asking yourself, 'What can they do now?' and you're matching that against the place where you want them to end up" (p. 29). As Jimenez described, Sarah looked at not only what possibilities existed for her students at a given point, but also at how current curricular choices might move her students toward larger goals that she envisioned for them.

January 29, 1997. Three steps forward, two steps back. Although Sarah never verbalized to me that her work with students seemed, at times, like an uphill struggle, I often wondered how she appeared so consistently positive, even during those moments when the actions of the children seem to violently contradict the growth that she had hoped for and worked toward since August. Linda Christensen (1994) writes that a fellow teacher once told her, "It's hard to build community when you feel like you're 'hoisting elephants through mud!'" (p. 50). Following days like today, it's hard to believe that Sarah would not feel this way as well.

During morning announcements, Sarah advised the class of a *"new mail call policy"* instated by Mr. Dixon. She explained to the kids that, *"Some people were writing things that hurt other peoples' feelings,"* and that, as a result, Mr. Dixon had

requested that all outgoing letters be read by the classroom teacher before they could be sent through the school mail system. Sarah later told me that this policy had gone into effect as a result of a *"horrible mail message"* that Evan had written to another child. Sarah had called Evan's mother yesterday to talk about the incident. She described her reaction, *"His mom was so mad that she said she was about to kill him, and she told me she was going to beat him."* Although I had not brought up the incident to Evan, he had approached me this morning showing me a mark on his arm, and matter-of-factly explaining, *"That's where I got beat."* Evan continued to be out of sorts today. When he wasn't able to go to centers, he protested loudly to the class, calling out, *"Oh my God, I don't believe you all,"* and *"She's mean to everyone in this whole wide world"* (referring to Sarah). Sarah did not address his outburst directly; instead, she asked him to get out his homework folder and begin to work.

Alton's day was characterized by both encouraging and alarming behaviors. He was quiet throughout most of the early morning hours, but participated very positively during a group reading activity. Sarah divided the class into groups of three children. She asked if I could work with the group that included Alton, Erin and Chip. Their task was to choose a trade book to read from a collection that Sarah had available, and to determine their group strategy for reading the book together. Throughout the activity, Alton appeared to be particularly supportive of Erin, the only girl in the group, who was struggling a bit with the text. When the three argued over the book selection, Alton intervened and remarked, "Go with the little girl!" in support of Erin's book choice. When Erin stumbled during her reading, Alton assisted her with many of the words. At Erin's and Chip's urging, Alton read more of the text than anyone.

Early in the afternoon, Sarah asked if I could work with Alton as he finished a spelling test, before he joined the group in the gym for what Sarah referred to as, "P.E. with me." As he finished the test, I was disturbed when he told me, "When I come to school, I feel like hitting Donald's head 25,000 times." I was struck by the intensity of his expression, as well as the unpredictable nature of his considerations toward Donald.

Following P.E., Sarah dropped off the children at the library for their scheduled time with Mrs. Armstrong, the school librarian. Midway through the 30 minute period, however, Sarah was called to the library and told by Mrs. Armstrong that, while about

half of the class had behaved well, Vincent, Alton, Evan, Sereita and Anthony "wouldn't listen at all." She added that Alton had hit Donald physically several times. Sarah's first response was to Alton, *"Let's go - NOW."* She walked him to Mr. Dixon's office and returned for the rest of the group. After asking the children involved to apologize to Mrs. Armstrong, Sarah walked the group back to class. In a firm but composed manner she addressed the kids concerning the trouble that occurred in library. She emphasized to them, *"When we're in library, our rules go. Our rules go everywhere we are."* Sarah reviewed each of the four classroom rules with the kids, explaining that next week they needed to make extra effort in library to follow the policies and adding that clips would be moved according to Mrs. Armstrong's report concerning their efforts.

As the class transitioned from this discussion to Math, I walked Donald towards the special teacher he was scheduled to meet. En route we saw the guidance counselor in the hallway and she greeted him, "Hi Donald. How are you today?" His response was telling. "Good . . . But Alton just tried to kill me!" Passing the office on the way back, I saw Alton waiting, looking both tearful and angry. Returning to the classroom I heard Evan muttering, "I hate library. I hate art. I hate everything." I was amazed at Sarah's composure as she guided the kids through a hands-on Math activity.

February 5, 1997. Talking with Sarah today, she remarked, *"Evan is back to* (being) *Evan. He passed through whatever little phase had gripped him, and he's doing very well."* I had noticed that both Evan and Alton were exhibiting a good deal of self-control and were interacting with classmates more positively this week. To support Alton's efforts, Sarah had purchased silly putty for him and placed it in a desk in the hallway, just outside their classroom door. She talked with Kelly and me at lunch about how she hoped he might use it, *"This is what we're trying - if he can come here instead of hit. I don't know if he'll have the self control to get himself there and hit the silly putty or stretch it or do whatever . . . he did go and use the silly putty today."* As she had done for Evan by offering him colored markers and paper several weeks before, Sarah was now offering Alton a strategy that he might use to calm himself down when he felt angry.

Although Sarah talked hopefully about both Alton and Evan, she was quite concerned about Anthony. While in Kelly's room last Friday he had hit another boy, hard enough that it knocked the boy back onto a table. Kelly had subsequently discussed

159

the incident with both Sarah and John, and Anthony had been suspended for a day. He was now back in school, but had made several comments which pointed to an additional concern. Sarah explained, *"He came in yesterday and said, 'I don't have to apologize. My mom said I can do whatever I want.' So I said to him, 'Well, not in my class. You can not. If that's OK with Mom, you can do that at home. But not in my class.'"* Anthony's mother had not contacted Sarah, but had phoned Kelly, telling her that she did not believe the school's "version" of the incident. She added that Anthony was accused because he was a Black child and the other child was white. Anthony's mother went on to call the superintendent of Valley City Schools to report her concern. Back in the classroom, Sarah was worried that the aftermath of this episode might impact not only Anthony's behavior, but ultimately his academic learning. She told me, *"It's very sad for him. Because he is as smart as a whip. He got a straight A report card. But now that we've started the new nine weeks, I've said to him, 'If your behavior continues like this, you will not get a good grade, because you're not doing your work.'"*

Given her concerns, Sarah had ultimately decided to call Anthony's mother. She described their conversation:

> *"She started rather defensive, and she told me that I was defensive. And then we were talking for an hour and went through the cultural differences and things like that. And at the end she said, 'I'm really glad that we can have a talk about this.' But I think this is a big thing for her. She may feel that it would be much easier for him to have an African American teacher. We figure that he may be one that won't loop next year. There is an African American third grade teacher."*

On several occasions Sarah had mentioned to me that she wondered whether or not some of the children's parents felt that their child might benefit more from having an African American teacher, even if the parents had not verbalized this belief to her. In Kwanzaa and Me (1995), Vivian Paley examines this issue from a variety of perspectives, including those of her African American students and parents, as well as fellow teachers who are both African American and white. Although their perspectives reveal multiple considerations, one common strand connects many of the responses Paley received - the need for teachers, whether white or African American, to ask and learn from parents about their child's family and community cultural contexts. One of Paley's respondents, a white teacher of African American children, expressed, "I may not know a

lot, but I learn quickly. I go to the source, to older children, to black adults, and they fill me in. What's that language about, what's the meaning of this or that? I find it useful. People have to explain themselves and I have to explain myself" (p. 89). Promotion of this type of dialogue between teachers and parents characterizes Paley's work as a whole.

Educational researcher Lisa Delpit (1994), however, raises concerns about Paley's perspectives. She writes, "Paley's book and her approach to children have many strengths, and I could not hope for a more sensitive white teacher of African-American children. Yet I worry" (p. 132). Delpit expresses that when her own daughter becomes school aged, she has distinct beliefs about the educational environment which would best support her learning and growth. She states, "I strongly want her to be in an African-American environment. There will be time later to learn about differences, to learn to struggle in a sometimes hostile environment. But when she's five, I don't want her too far from home" (p. 132)

I wondered where Sarah stood concerning these considerations. She admitted to me at one point, *"Maybe Anthony would do better with an African American teacher,"* suggesting that perhaps she did not discount Delpit's assertions. Yet on a daily basis, I was aware of the many ways in which Sarah continued to open a dialog between herself and the parents of her students, regardless of race. She expressed genuinely her desire to be a part of this type of dialog and her hope that students from racial backgrounds different than her own would continue to be members of her class.

After lunch today, a chain of events took place that seemed to have a positive impact upon Alton. When Sarah and I arrived at the lunchroom to walk the kids back, Alton reported to Sarah that he wanted to talk to Mr. Dixon right away, because a third grader had hit him in the cafeteria. He was noticeably upset. Sarah agreed that it was a good idea for him to bring the incident to Mr. Dixon's attention and asked if I could walk Alton to the office. Mr. Dixon took time out to talk with Alton, asking him to describe what happened and to provide him with names of other children who had been there as well. As the afternoon passed, several children were called from Sarah's classroom to speak with Mr. Dixon regarding the incident. Late in the day, Mr. Dixon came to the doorway of the classroom and asked if he could have everyone's attention. He then announced, "I want to compliment Alton for how he handled the incident at lunch today."

Alton beamed. Later Sarah told me that John had mentioned to her how important today's events were for Alton. Sarah explained that she and John felt that Alton needed to see a pattern of consistency and to realize that when others hit, they get in trouble too. Fifth grade teacher, Cindy Tenner, described to her colleague, Ushma Shah (1996), how difficult it was for her students when the building principal did not compliment or even comment on excellent work that her students had presented. She commented that, "the fact that Mr. Elson hadn't complimented their work seemed to change the overall success of the performance" (p. 55). In Tenner's situation, children sensed a diminishment of their success because it was ignored by someone in a position of authority. Conversely, it seemed to me today that Mr. Dixon's marked effort to compliment Alton affirmed and strengthened the success that he had experienced.

February 7, 1997. Donald's attendance and work in school has followed an up and down pattern in recent days. Since his family moved several weeks ago, he has been coming to school increasingly later. This week he arrived at 10:00 on Wednesday, at 10:30 on Thursday, and at 11:00 today. Subsequently, while the other children participated in a variety of class activities this afternoon, Donald began to make up his morning work. For the last half hour of school, during which Sarah's and Kelly's classes would participate in "Fun Friday," Donald and I, along with Anthony, made our way to the library to use the tables there for study time. Both boys were well behaved, drawing and making Valentine cards. Close to the end of our time together, Donald lifted up his notebook to reveal a large piece of silly putty, which had been flattened out by the notebook. I recognized that it was similar to Alton's and asked him where he had gotten it, to which he said he had gotten it "here." I didn't say anything further. As we walked back to Sarah's classroom, Anthony marched ahead to distribute his Valentines, but Donald hung back, proceeding very slowly towards the classroom.

When we arrived, I noticed that Alton was angry. He had walked into the hallway and was tearing down pieces of artwork from the wall. After Donald entered the classroom, Alton looked into the hallway desk for his silly putty and reported to me that it wasn't there. I then went to Sarah and explained that I had seen silly putty in Donald's notebook - did she think that he might have seen it in the hallway desk and taken it out to play with? Sarah asked me to track down Donald, who had just taken his bookbag and

walked toward the office to meet his mom. When we returned to the classroom, Sarah was firm. She asked Donald if he had the putty, and he responded that he did not, adding that he had given it to someone. She asked if he could go get it, explaining that he needed to retrieve it or instead wait here until his mom came to pick him up. He stood there silently.

When Donald's mom arrived, Sarah asked if she might be able to meet with her and Mr. Dixon together. Mrs. King agreed to, and they met for about thirty minutes. Sarah told me later that during their meeting they had initially talked not only about Donald's responsibility to keep from taking items that didn't belong to him, but also about how Donald's learning was being affected by the amount of school time he was missing in the mornings. Donald's mother had explained that the family was presently living in a hotel outside of Eastside's attendance area, beyond the boundaries for bus service. I was impressed by Sarah's description of both her own and John Dixon's responses to Mrs. King's situation. She described the ensuing conversation as one that focused upon *"Donald's learning."* John emphasized that Donald could remain at Eastside for as long as his mother wanted to bring him, to help maintain a sense of consistency for him. Sarah added that although both she and John had reiterated that arriving earlier would best support Donald's academic learning, she planned to continue to offer him added time each day for the purpose of making up work that he might miss in the early mornings.

Reflecting on this situation later, I considered a statement made by elementary teacher, L.C. Clark (1994), who writes that, "Even in the midst of crisis they (his students) have a responsibility to get an education, and we have a responsibility to expect them to go about acquiring one" (p. 126). Clark adds that if educators don't maintain high expectations, the students will ultimately suffer, explaining that by expecting less from children, "educators in effect lock those considered to be 'disadvantaged' or 'at-risk' into the very situations from which education should free them" (p.128). Sarah's words and actions with Donald seemed to align with Clark's belief. Building from her awareness of the crisis Donald was experiencing, living in a transitional situation, Sarah responded by trying to determine how she could support him. While she continued to expect him to participate in classroom learning tasks, she also provided him with supports

such as added time and encouragement, to help make these expectations attainable.

February 13, 1997. Sarah returned to school today after being out for two days while her husband was ill. She mentioned to me that the children's substitute teacher had reported having a great deal of difficulty with the group, specifying Evan, Alton, Vincent and Anthony as particularly troublesome. Because the substitute had phoned her at home the evening before, Sarah had debated whether or not she should begin today by *"dealing with"* the problems that had occurred. She decided against it, starting instead with the "clean slate" policy that was so characteristic of her teaching. Sarah described to me what took place this morning:

> *"They seemed very excited I was back. They all asked about David, 'How's your husband? How's David?' Evan came right in and he said first off, 'Hi, Mrs. Rhea.' And I said, 'Oh, hi Evan!' He said, 'I had a bad day yesterday.' And I didn't say anything. And he went on, 'Actually, I had a bad day the day before.' He brought it up. So then we talked . . . what could he have done to make him have a good day? First he was blaming her* (the substitute). *He said, 'She's too mean. I don't like her. Next time you're absent, let me go with you.' I said, 'It shouldn't matter whoever is teaching the class. You know you're a good kid. What could you have done to make your day better?' So we talked about that. That's a hard concept still, right now. They were fabulous* (today), *absolutely fabulous. Ronnie said, 'I just want to say, I'm glad you're back . . . I don't like how she did things.' So we talked about that, that sometimes teachers will do things different, and it's okay that it's different. Mrs. Rhea does it one way, that doesn't mean it's a better way. It's just one way. And most of them, you know, I think overall did well. It was only about four that were apparently horrible."*

Teacher Bob Peterson (1994) asserts that, "it's important that children see themselves as actors in the world, not just things acted upon" (p. 38). When Sarah spoke with Evan about his "bad day" it was clear that she hoped for him to perceive this sense of agency within the situation . . . *"What could you have done to make your day better?"* It was significant, also, that Sarah was hopeful that her students were moving towards a realization of their stance as "actors" or "agents." When she noted that this was a hard concept for some to grasp, she added, *"right now,"* suggesting that students' perceptions and understandings were presently at a point that quite possibly could change, not at a fixed point.

February 17, 1997. McLaren (1989) describes what took place in his class each

morning: "At nine o'clock, I assembled the kids on the carpet. 'Well, boys and girls, does anybody have any news?' I asked, as I did first thing every morning" (p. 141). In a similar fashion, Sarah introduced to her students an activity that she referred to as "P.N." This morning was apparently the second time that the kids had taken part in P.N. Sarah called them to the rug area and asked, *"Does anybody remember what P.N. is? We talked about it last week."* The discussion that followed revealed that P.N. stood for "personal news." Sharing of personal news would occur when Sarah called "P.N.," which could take place at any time during the day. Once the group had assembled on the rug, Sarah would set the timer for a specified amount of minutes, and the kids could share their news, in turn, until the timer bell rang. Today's P.N. involved three students. Donald remarked that the weather, which had been cold and snowy, was supposed to be pretty tomorrow. Christy described, in detail, a recent episode of the television show, "Are You Afraid of the Dark?" which she had watched over the weekend. Evan told about a snowball fight he took part in. When the timer rang, Sarah announced, *"Thank you for sharing. We will do P.N. again tomorrow."* I enjoyed listening to Sarah's kids talk, reflecting that this was an public opportunity for them to share as experts about what they knew and had experienced.

While the kids remained seated on the rug, Sarah explained that this week the focus for morning reading would switch from China to African American history. Throughout the discussion that followed, Sarah utilized this topic focus as an opportunity to openly and respectfully consider issues of race. She began by asking the kids: *"Why do we have African American history month?"* Donald responded, "Because of Martin Luther King." Meredith added, "We're going to talk about what Blacks invented." Sarah asked further, *"Why do we call Blacks African Americans?"* When Alton said something about Black people coming from Africa, Sarah asked him, *"Alton, are you from Africa?"* He replied, "No." She went on, *"But where are your relatives from a long, long time ago? . . . They're from Africa!"*

Restating her original question, *"Why do we study African American history month?"* Sarah explained to the kids, *"When Mrs. Rhea was a little girl, a thousand years ago, we didn't have an African American history month. We just ignored all of the inventions and important things that they have done. But then we said, 'this is wrong.'*

There have been a lot of famous African Americans and this is what they've done. And we need to notice that." It was interesting that throughout this explanation, Sarah's language positioned herself as "we" and African Americans as "they," essentially speaking from a position of power (Sleeter, 1995). This use of language that "separates" stood out in contrast to the daily, ongoing efforts that Sarah made to address all children as valuable, contributing members of a common group. Following this explanation, Sarah introduced the book that she would read aloud today, an illustrated story about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

At various points throughout the reading, Sarah paused to raise questions for discussion. Stopping at a picture that showed Martin's children playing separately from a group of white children, she asked the group, *"Why weren't Martin Luther King's kids allowed to play with white kids?"* Responses varied. Alton stated, "White policemen used to beat up the Black people for no reason." Vincent said, "Because their mothers told them not to play together. But God invented us all, and we're all the same." Christy replied, "Because in the old days, they didn't want to mix them all up." Finally Evan spoke up, in a tone that suggested his belief that the answer was obvious, "It's the color of their skin, Mrs. R." At this point, Sarah responded, *"So you agree with Vincent, because of the color of their skin they couldn't play together."* After she spoke, Donald added, "It doesn't matter what color, what it is. It's just the same."

Although several children had mentioned the idea of "sameness," it was clear that Sarah's focus today was, instead, on the distinct impact of events in U.S. history for African American people. As the Martin Luther King story continued, it was interesting to me how engrossed both Alton and Evan were in the events Sarah read about. Both boys, in fact, answered her questions almost instantly, or even predicted what would happen on the next page. When Sarah read, *"He finished school at age . . . "* both boys said "15" in unison, which Sarah then confirmed as the correct age. When Sarah asked if anyone could remember the Rosa Parks story, Alton described it quite accurately. Sarah commended his prediction, then went on to read about the incident. As she read, Alton remarked enthusiastically, "Yes!"

As the Rosa Parks story concluded, responses that the kids raised were interesting. Alton remarked, "Now white people and black people can get on a bus and sit . . ." Sarah

added, *"Wherever they want!"* Referring back to a comment that Regina had made earlier in the reading, Sarah continued, *"The bus company lost a lot of money, as Regina pointed out."* As the discussion came to an end, it was ironic that Chip stated, "There's no Black people on my bus." There was probably reality reflected in his statement - Valley City neighborhoods have been historically segregated, and at this point in time they remained so for the most part. When I later observed the kids as they left at the end of the school day, it was apparent that there was support for Chip's assertion. His bus was predominantly ridden by white children. Buses ridden by Sereita, Regina, Vincent and Alton held almost all Black children. Jonathan, Meredith, Christy and Ronnie, who lived quite close to Eastside, were included in a group called, "Walkers and car riders," a group which Donald had temporarily joined. Evan went with a group to an after-school care program, which was predominantly attended by Black children. Only Erin and Anthony rode buses that were somewhat racially mixed. Teacher Rita Tenorio (1994) states, "Young children are not 'colorblind.' Instead, they have an unstated but nonetheless sophisticated understanding of issues of race and power" (p. 24). Chip's comment supports her assumption.

February 19, 1997. Mike Rose (1995) describes several classrooms he visited in a way that reminds me of the feeling I've often had in Sarah's classroom. He writes, "To be sure, not everyone was engaged. Everyone, students and teachers, had bad days. But overall, these classrooms were exciting places to be. People were encouraged to be smart" (p. 416). Several occurrences today were evidence of opportunities that Sarah continually offered her students, opportunities to "be smart," as Rose describes.

In Reading Workshop this week, the kids have been working on their own or in pairs, reading books about famous African Americans. At this point in their readings, Sarah directed the kids to *"take notes on what's important about your person,"* modeling first how she might "take notes" when reading a book about someone. As I circulated amongst the students today, while they were involved in this activity, I was struck by the quality of the drawings and written notes that they had compiled. Because Donald was working on his own, I asked if he wanted me to talk through the book with him. He declined my offer, explaining that he could do it by himself. I was quite impressed when I returned to check on him towards the end of workshop time. He had filled one side of

his page almost completely with printed sentences about his chosen character, Martin Luther King. When I told him how impressed I was, he looked up at me with a proud smile.

Later this afternoon, I observed Sarah's inquiry session. Today's focus was related to determining the format that each inquiry group would choose as they developed a project to represent their learning. Sarah began the session by focusing the attention of the group on the rolling chart. She announced, *"Alright, I need eyes up on the chart for two minutes . . . We brainstormed yesterday about projects we could make and we came up with . . . "* Sarah then read through the list that the class had compiled. (See Figure 11).

book	picture	mobile
model	movie	play show/puppet show
poster	stuffed creature	story
poem	song	sculpture
house	cage	food
diorama	puzzle	kite
	game	

Figure 11. Sarah's students contributed to this list of possible ideas for inquiry projects.

Sarah suggested that a "mural" might be another possibility and added it to their list. She then discussed these options with the kids. *"Now, if I have football as my topic, would I do a kite as my project?"* Several kids answered, "No." Sarah asked, *"Why?"* Jonathan responded, "Because kites don't have anything to do with football!" Sarah then explained that the groups would have several minutes to decide as a team what kind of project they might try. Referring to guidelines which had been previously established for inquiry projects, she asked, *"Do you have to do just one of those?"* Several children responded, "No." Sarah confirmed, *"Right, because if you are in the rabbit group you may want to do a poster and a cage for your rabbit."* She continued, *"Now, I want you to talk. Do you have to agree as a group?"* Several said, "Yeah." Sarah agreed, *"Right. You can't turn in twelve different ideas for your group."* Following these directions, children divided into groups to discuss possibilities.

Across the course of the day, there was a good degree of decision making and independent work that the students negotiated through quite responsibly. Complaints and

disruptions were minimal, and the quality of work that the students engaged in was evident.

        <u>February 21, 1997</u>. In a June interview, as Sarah reflected on the shifts and changes across the school year, she mentioned to me that there came a point in late winter during which, *"we started to die a little bit . . . it had been like summer, sunny, blossoming . . . and then we went through a hard time."* As soon as I arrived this morning, I sensed a mood in Sarah's classroom that was distinctly different from anything I had experienced there before. The children were extremely quiet, almost silent, as they worked through their early morning routines. When Sarah called them to the rug area, their procession there seemed solemn. After the children had arranged themselves on the rug, Sarah addressed them in a matter-of-fact tone:

> *"You knew that at the end of the day yesterday, I was angry. All day yesterday people were really mean to me. And sometimes we forget that people have feelings, that they're people too. And I went home crying. You talked back. You would not do Math. And we are in school to . . .* (several kids chimed in, "learn"). *People threw things yesterday. People hurt. People kicked. And all of these things are rude to me. Not only were you rude to me, you were rude and mean to each other. You pushed and shoved in line. People got hurt. And that's not nice, is it?"* (Many children shook their heads). *If Erin said something to me and I said, 'No way, you fathead,' would that hurt your feelings, Erin?* (Erin nodded). *Someone said that to me yesterday. If Meredith asked for a magazine and someone threw it to her, would that hurt her feelings? . . . Now, I don't treat people that way, and it shocks me that others treat people that way."*

        As Sarah's statements to the children continued, I considered how much the "yesterday" she was describing differed from the last time I had visited, which had been just one day earlier. Sarah's account of yesterday's events were close to what Linda Christensen (1994a) describes when she talks about a feeling she's had amongst her students at times, "Too often these days I'm in the middle of anger, and there's no safe spot. My first impulse is to make everyone sit down, be polite and listen to each other, a great goal that I've come to realize doesn't happen easily" (p. 50). It was clear that yesterday's events had not provided Sarah and her students with what Rose refers to as, "safety from insult and diminishment," but rather, that verbal as well as physical hurts had been numerous. As Sarah continued to talk to the group, her focus shifted toward what might possibly be done as a result of the day's events.

<div align="center">169</div>

"Now, I went home and thought, we have all these things that other classes don't have - centers, clips, Fun Friday, team points . . . But I don't think team points and the other things are working. Being mean to each other, is that a good neighbor? (Several kids responded, "No"). *Now my first thought was to take everything away . . . We can just call your parents if you misbehave or send you to the office. That would be easy; that's what most people do. We can just have a very traditional classroom. We can do our reading work, our math work, our social studies work, and we can go home. So then I thought about it, and went home and yelled at my husband and stamped and raved, and he said, 'Is everybody like that?' And I said, 'Well, no.' But yesterday, pretty much everybody was like that. But I thought . . . those who want to be part of my kind, caring class can do those things* (referring to the "fun" things the kids enjoy in Sarah's class). *Others can be in our class <u>room</u>, but not do those things."*

At this point, Sarah provided the children with the opportunity to make a choice. She directed them:

"When you get to your seats, I'll give you a blank card. If you want to be part of the kind, caring class, put 'yes' and your name. If you don't want to be part of the kind, caring class, or don't think you can, put 'no,' because obviously it's not that important to you. But be careful. If you want to, but you back talk, I'll take your clip down and it stays in my desk. For two weeks you won't have those special things. If two weeks pass and you want to try it again, you can . . . Now, I think all of you can be a part of the kind, caring classroom. I've seen you do it . . . When you go to your seat quietly, you'll get a card."

The kids took their seats and quietly wrote on the cards Sarah distributed. As they finished, she collected the cards and took them with her to the side of the room near the 4-3-2-1 posters. I noticed then that all of the clothespins had been removed and that the team cooperation chart had been taken down. As Sarah opened and read each card, she replaced that child's clothespin on the number "4" poster. Every child had responded "yes." She then asked Vincent and Erin if they would put up the team cooperation chart.

Later Sarah explained that by the end of the day yesterday, she had been visibly upset and very quiet. She mentioned that Erin's mother, Christy's mother, and Ronnie's father had called her last night out of concern. This morning, Christy had presented her with a card she had created that included a poem of encouragement. In Sarah's final comment, though, she alluded to a remaining sense of frustration, *"Look who didn't call - Evan's mom."* Evan was absent today. I wondered what had occurred that involved him

yesterday but decided not to bring it up.

February 24, 1997. Two things caught my attention when I arrived this morning. First, Sarah reported that Donald's mom had now moved into an apartment in another school's attendance area. He had cleaned out his desk yesterday and would not be returning to Eastside. Second, I noticed that across the overhead transparency in slanting letters, someone had written, "I love you." The handwriting looked a lot like Donald's, and I wondered whether or not he had left the message. When Sarah turned on the projector to write out the morning message, she told the class, *"Look at my overhead - I'm loving it. This is a secret message that someone left, and I liked it so much, I thought I'd write around it."* The message remained on the transparency film for the day.

As today proceeded, many of Sarah's kids exhibited an attentiveness and a willingness to participate. I was impressed by the sophistication of the African American reports that the children had worked on last week. In conjunction with a spelling lesson this morning, Sarah asked the kids to look through these reports and find any words they had written in them which used the short i or short u vowel sounds, sounds which were being emphasized this week in. Sarah explained, *"In two minutes, you'll share what you find . . . to add to our spelling list."* The spelling list grew substantially as the kids added their contributions. As I read through what they came up with, I noticed the wide range of words that was reflected across the cumulative list. The "short i" list that they compiled is represented in Figure 12.

<u>Short i</u>

*millionaire	lived
nickname	it's
institute	*Richmond
King	his
Nordic	Martin
big	wins
is	fists
inches	Nick
with	bigger
in	hitting

<u>Figure 12</u>. The "short i" spelling words that Sarah's students
found in their African American reports.

171

Sarah placed astericks beside words that could be considered for "extra credit." She then asked the kids to follow a procedure they had been using since the fall - each person was to select from the cumulative list the words that they wanted to study for the week. They wrote down their choices in a spelling notebook, which they would use for study, and on an index card, which Sarah kept in a file box on her desk. Some students chose as few as 6 or 8 words; others chose as many as the entire cumulative list. Sarah made a practice of writing a suggested number on children's individual index cards, noting the minimum amount of words that a given child could select, but she never chose their words for them. When Friday's spelling test time came, Sarah generally asked the kids to work in pairs, each reading out the test words for their partner. At this point in the school year, the kids were quite familiar with this process and proceeded to follow it without much difficulty, except for those occasions when partners chose to argue or agitate each other.

Later in the morning, Sarah directed the children's attention to their African American reports once again, this time towards the purpose of transitioning the reports from rough draft to final draft stage. Sarah explained to them, *"You have choices for doing your final draft - on paper, on the computer or on big paper. It's your choice; it's up to you."* She also pointed out that these final drafts were to be their *"good copies,"* and asked, *"What do we need to be sure it has?"* Christy responded, "Good handwriting." Jonathan added, "No mistakes at all . . . the very best!" And Meredith replied, "No scribble on it - you can't do it in crayon!" Just before the kids began to work on the final drafts, Sarah mentioned that after these had been completed, the kids would be *"teaching the class"* about their famous African American person. I guessed that this would be the final stage in this research project. The kids had moved through distinct steps these past two weeks: selecting a person to study, reading about him or her, taking notes, producing a rough draft - whether on their own or while talking it through with Sarah or a partner, editing their work with the help of a teacher, preparing a final draft, and soon - sharing their work with others. The process reminded me of the "authoring cycle" described by Harste, Short and Burke (1988), who assert that, "reading and writing are ways of learning and developing as well as communicating what has already been learned" (p.

172

208). Using reading and writing as tools, Sarah hoped that her students might learn "how to learn" and "how to teach." Across the course of this particular day, many children displayed an ability to responsibly manage independent learning situations as readers, writers and teachers.

February 28, 1997. By this point in the year, I observed that the general mood within Sarah's classroom was participatory, open to student discussion and contributions, and built on cooperation amongst its members. I realized today, however, that Sarah also believed, though, that it was important for her students to experience what it meant to act responsibly in less interactive, more regulated learning situations. In Kwanzaa and Me (1995), Paley addresses the issue of "code-switching," noting that children are capable of perceiving differing expectations that are relevant to various contexts and situations, and learning to act accordingly (p. 41). This afternoon I observed a form of "code-switching" that Sarah requested of her students when she announced that because the class would be taking a math test, they would need to adhere to "test behavior." She explained to them: *"If you have a question, raise your hand, and I will come tell you what to do. There is no talking between us. This is a test."* Sarah circulated amongst the children as they worked on the test, stopping to answer questions when someone raised their hand. When Regina walked over to Sarah to ask her something, Sarah told her, *"You know how to get my attention."* Regina returned to her desk and raised her hand. When Vincent walked towards her a few minutes later, Sarah remained consistent, telling him, *"That's not how you get my attention. Thank you."* He, too, went back to his desk and waited there until Sarah came to him, raising his hand to seek her attention.

Given the usual open discussion and active participation that Sarah invited from her students, this type of situation seemed strikingly more rigid in nature. Sarah recognized, though, that it would be highly unusual for any person to negotiate life beyond the second grade without running into situations that required adherence to a rigid set of standards - including school situations at all levels, SAT exams, and performance in many on-the-job situations. Delpit (1995) asserts that "students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life" (p. 45). Was adherence to "test-taking behavior" necessary preparation for success in specific life situations? Was it a type of "code" to be learned, in the sense that Delpit refers to? I

wondered.

Following the test situation, the class returned to activities more characteristic of the typical goings-on in Sarah's room. Fun Friday today included a "friends party" to celebrate the end of February, which Sarah had dubbed "Friends' month" several weeks ago. To conclude the afternoon, Sarah asked Erin and Sereita, who had been voted "Stars of the Week," to share with the class their Star posters - large pages on which they could tape pictures of themselves and write out answers to questions such as, "My favorite foods are . . . ," "I wish I was a . . . ," and "About my family . . . " We learned that Erin doesn't like lobster, that she loves cats, and that she wishes she was a millionaire. Sereita described each member of her family for us, but told us, "I'm not going to tell you my brother's name, because he has a funny name!" When she announced that she wished to be a teacher, Sarah clapped and told her, *"Good choice!"* When they finished, Sarah asked the group to give both girls a round of applause, and they did so, heartily.

Sarah then added that it was time to select next week's "Star," explaining, *"Think about who's been the best helper for the week, and the best, kindest, caringest person."* She then passed out index cards, and the kids wrote down their choices. When the tally revealed a tie between Anthony and Regina, Sarah called for a revote between the two of them, and the process was repeated. Finally Sarah announced, *"Alrighty, we have our Star of the Week for next week, Regina. Let's give her a round of applause!"*

Thinking later about today's events, I believed that they were reflective of the "code-switching" that Paley spoke of. "Test behavior" required quiet work and hand raising. "Star of the Week" involved personal sharing and student voting. Different expectations were relevant to different contexts. I considered the varying elements that collectively comprised life within this learning community and determined that they were elements connected by Sarah's belief that each context supported the development of these kids as responsible, positive community members.

March - April 1997: Expectation, Guidance and Support

> *"These classrooms were places of expectation and responsibility.*
> *Teachers took students seriously as intellectual and social beings.*
> *Young people had to work hard, think things through, come to terms*
> *with each other - and there were times when such effort took a student*

to his or her limits. It is important to note that such assumptions were realized through a range of supports, guides and structures: from the way teachers organized curriculum and invited and answered questions, to the means of assistance they and their aides provided, to the various ways they encouraged peer support and assistance, to the atmosphere they created in the room. These classrooms required thought, participation, effort - they were places where you did things - but not without mechanisms to aid involvement and achievement" (Rose, 1995, p. 415).

As Sarah had described in our January conversation, the *"academic side"* of classroom life seemed to be given an increasingly greater degree of attention as the second semester progressed. Sarah presented to her students a widening range of opportunities for inquiry, beginning research and presentation of what they had learned. Many of her kids confronted academic and relational challenges with positive attitudes and energy on the vast majority of occasions across this time period. Others seemed more tentative, resistant or ambivalent when invited to work hard academically or sort out differences with others. Yet even with these kids, I detected a growing degree of curiosity and interest in subject matter, observed increasingly more frequent instances of cooperation with peers, and sensed the development of positive perceptions about themselves and classroom life. Sarah believed that they were taking small but significant forward steps toward seeing themselves as worthwhile learners and contributors.

While Sarah offered stimulating and challenging opportunities for learning, she also provided her students with a substantial amount of support for that learning. On numerous occasions, she modeled how to consider what you want to know, how to find answers to questions you have, and how to revise, polish and present what you have learned. In addition, Sarah modeled for the kids how to read, commend, raise questions of and make suggestions about the work of others, and she provided them with opportunities to work as partners or small groups for the purpose of supporting one another's work as readers, editors and encouragers. Finally, she or another adult worked one-on-one with each child at various points across their processes as researchers and writers.

March 3, 1997. Today I began my full week in Sarah's classroom, a week during which I planned to observe and participate in her room daily from the time that teachers

arrived at the building in the morning through the end of their scheduled days. I also hoped to attend any meetings which were to take place after school. Across the course of the day today, I observed Sarah's students immersing themselves in the creation of "China projects," which were focused on China-related topics of the students' choosing. During two separate time blocks, Sarah provided them with time to work on these projects, following a process similar to the one they had used to do their African American reports. At the beginning of "Reading Workshop" time, Sarah listed on the board the various stages at which the children were presently working as they put together their China reports. Regina, Evan, Alton, Christy and Chip were at what Sarah referred to as the "Five Questions" stage; Meredith, Jonathan, Ronnie, Vincent and Anthony were at the "Research and Answer Questions" stage, and Erin had moved on to "Begin Report." "Edit" and "Final Report" were vacant stages at this point. Sarah was guiding the children through this project using an inquiry type model. Earlier in the year she had mentioned to me her desire to frame learning in the content areas within an inquiry and discovery format. The China projects, as well as the earlier Native American Tewa study and African American reports, were steps in this curricular direction.

March 4, 1997. This morning's message from Sarah to her kids is shown in Figure 13.

March 4
Tuesday
        Good morning! It is supposed to be a lot warmer today and less
rainy! Good news.
        Our schedule today will be very strange! We will have reading,
our field trip to the hospital, lunch, art, guidance with Mrs. Carter, Writing
Workshop and centers. Have a very fun day!
        Pssst - 20 points is too easy for your guys! 25 points needed for
Fun Friday!
                                        Love,
                                             Mrs. R.

Figure 13. Sarah's morning message for March 4, 1997.

Sarah's message set the tone for the day in several ways. Not only did she alert her kids to the "strange" schedule that they would experience, but she also confirmed her

high expectations regarding their behavior, "raising the bar" from 20 to 25 points. This shift was reflective of her continuing emphasis that her kids were capable of good behavior.

Today's schedule was different than any I had experienced since beginning in Sarah's classroom. The class group was to leave at 9:30, along with Kelly's class, to participate in a field trip to a local hospital. Early in the morning I learned that parental permission slips for the field trip had not been returned for Anthony, Regina, Evan and Vincent. Subsequently, they would not be able to participate in the trip. As the group began their morning activities, Sarah pulled each of these four children aside individually to talk with them about activities that she had prepared for them to do in other teachers' classrooms while the remainder of the class was out of the building.

The trip itself went smoothly, and the class group returned to Eastside at about 11:30 AM. When we arrived, Sarah promptly sent for the children who had remained behind. At a couple of points throughout the remainder of the day, when the field trip was mentioned, Sarah commented not only about the experiences of those who had attended the trip, but also focused on what occurred for those who had stayed in other teachers' classrooms. This signaled to me that Sarah valued the practice of including all children in class matters. For writing workshop, Sarah directed the group, *"I'm going to set the timer for four minutes, and I want you to write to me about the hospital or about going to another teacher's class, because sometimes it's fun to go to a new class too."* When commending the kids for good behavior, she stated, *"All right. We have good news to share. We all got a compliment - those who were at the hospital were excellent, and those who were here got compliments from teachers for working hard."* Sarah drew attention to the diverse experiences of all class members, not just those that fell within the "standard" or "planned" activity for the day.

As this afternoon progressed, Sarah frequently complimented the children for their good behavior. In addition, she encouraged them to show how well they could behave for the guidance counselor, Mrs. Carter, who had remarked to Sarah earlier in the year, "How can you stand it . . . Are you crazy?" when Sarah mentioned her desire to loop with her present group of children. Before guidance began today Sarah told the kids, *"You know, we have guidance this afternoon. The guidance teacher doesn't think*

177

you can behave and be polite. Can you?" When several kids replied, "Oh, of course . . . you know we can, Mrs. Rhea," Sarah told them, *"I know you can. You need to show her that also."* She then mentioned to the kids that she would sit and watch them during guidance, adding that she would write down the names of those who were showing how well they could do. Throughout the guidance class that followed, the kids listened and participated and Sarah made notations on her notepad. As the guidance counselor was leaving, she told the class, "Two thumbs up for Mrs. Rhea's class today - for good listening!" After she left, Sarah complimented the kids for their respectful behavior and moved up their clips.

Instead of doing centers this afternoon, Sarah shifted the class focus to the China project stages they had begun to work through yesterday. Her approach today reminded me of one described by third grade teacher Donna Maxim (1990), who states, "I model a variety of procedures used by researchers. I demonstrate, students practice, and we share our discoveries as we investigate new topics across the curriculum" (p. 4). Today Sarah engaged the kids in a collaborative activity that focused on how to come up with questions, find answers, and translate their findings into report form - using an actual China "topic" as a model. Although she demonstrated and guided throughout this process, students' contributions were the substance of the report they developed.

Sarah asked the group, *"Let's say we are doing the topic, 'kites in China' - what would be a question that I'd like to know?* (pause) *We're doing an example."* When no children initially responded, Sarah wrote on the overhead: <u>Kites</u> and <u>Questions</u> Then, underneath the Questions heading, she added: 1. What kinds of designs are on kites in China? Within a few seconds, children began to participate. Anthony suggested, "Another one is, 'What shapes are kites in China?'" Sarah added Anthony's suggestion as "2." underneath the Questions heading. She then guided, *"Come up with one more good kite question. Jonathan, what would be another good kite question that I could use if my topic was kites?"* Jonathan replied, "Did the Chinese invent kites?" Sarah added his response as Question number 3.

Next, the discussion shifted toward a focus on answering the questions. Sarah stated, *"Now, let's come up with some answers to the questions. I'll ask Vincent first because he did some research on this topic yesterday."* Vincent responded,

"Number one is people." Sarah confirmed Vincent's response and wrote the heading, "Answers" on the board, listing Vincent's suggestion, "people" underneath it. She then continued, *"What other types of designs have we seen on kites in China?"* Jonathan told her, "Dragons and designs, plain old designs." Sarah added "dragons" and "designs" underneath the Answers heading, and went on, *"What other designs? What did we see in that movie?"* Evan remarked, "The Phoenix Bird." Sarah added "birds" to the list underneath Answers. She then suggested to the kids, *"Let's finish this in a complete sentence . . . People, dragons, designs and birds are on Chinese kites."*   She wrote down the newly constructed sentences as she spoke. After constructing this answer, which Sarah labeled "1.", she guided the kids through a similar procedure to create the two additional answers. Once accomplished, the three answers read:

1.   People, dragons, designs and birds are on Chinese kites.
2. There are boxes, eagles, diamonds, dragons, birds, circles and rectangular shaped kites in China.
3. Yes, the Chinese people invented kites 3000 years ago.

Sarah then transitioned the discussion toward moving the answers into report form. She began, *"Now, these are all good answers; what am I going to do with all of these answers to put them in a report?"* Meredith stated, "Put them together." Sarah asked, *"How could I introduce my report on kites? What could I say?"* Ronnie explained, "China made kites because they thought they were important enough to put up in the air." Sarah questioned, *"Are they important in China?"* Ronnie responded, "Yes." Sarah, *"OK, let's say . . . 'In China, kites are very important.' Now, let's look back at our answers."* Anthony remarked, "How they were invented." Sarah added to the report, "They were invented there 3000 years ago," then told Anthony, *"Good thinking, now I have number three in my report . . . So what do you think we should add next?"* Jonathan told her, "Number two." Sarah asked him, *"What is number two about?"* As Jonathan read the sentence to her, she added to the report, "The Chinese kites come in many shapes. They could be boxes, eagles, diamonds, dragons, circles or rectangles." Sarah then stated to the group, *"We now have number two. What else so we need?"* Several kids called out, "Number one!" With the kids reading for her, Sarah wrote out, "They also have many designs on them. Some of the designs are dragons, people or birds."

Finally, Sarah asked the group, *"Do I have a report?"* Several kids replied,

"Yes." Sarah continued, *"Do I need to worry about spelling now?"* Several kids told her, "No." Sarah confirmed their response, *"No, because this is my rough draft . . . I took my answers, I put them together. I rearranged the numbers so they made sense, and I took out the numbers."* Sarah then asked Anthony to read the report back to the class. It read:

> In China, kites are very important. They were invented there 3000 years ago. The Chinese kites come in many shapes. They could be boxes, eagles, diamonds, dragons, circles or rectangles. They also have many designs on them. Some of the designs are dragons, people or birds.

Following this discussion, Sarah directed the kids to look at the board and find out where they were in the China report process, and then to pick up where they had stopped yesterday in working on these reports. In the time that remained, Sarah circulated the room, assisting kids who were at the "answer research questions" stage as they looked through books and other sources. On the whole, this lesson reflected Sarah's practice of modeling for and guiding her students through the processes which she hoped they might master: developing research questions, seeking answers to those questions, and reporting their findings. It was clear, as well, that she provided her kids with support through provision of material resources and individual assistance.

March 5, 1997. I was surprised when the classroom phone rang during inquiry time this afternoon. It was David Rhea, calling to respond to a phone call that Alton had placed a little bit earlier. Sarah and Alton had not been able to locate in his resource materials who the highest paid NFL players were, a question Alton had developed in relation to his inquiry project on football. Sarah had suggested that David might know and had given Alton permission to use the phone. David's prompt response was, "Steve Young, Dan Marino, John Elway and Emmitt Smith." Alton grinned. By directing Alton to David, it was apparent that Sarah did not limit her kids to printed resources alone when guiding them through the research process; in this case she supported the use of a person as an informational source.

After school, I was able to sit in on a faculty meeting that took place in the school library. Mr. Dixon distributed an agenda at the onset of the meeting, which listed discussion topics including:

1) Welcome to the student teachers

2) Site-Based Concerns
3) Looping/Multiage Grouping
4) Professional Article
5) Science Exhibits City-Wide
6) Program Courtesy
7) Announcements from Others
8) Grade Level Meeting.

For several of the agenda topics, discussion during today's meeting was brief. The bulk of the discussion was focused primarily upon two items: 1) Planning an all school carnival, announced by one of the kindergarten teachers, and 2) "Site-Based Concerns." The latter was of interest to me. I learned that there was a committee at Eastside referred to as "Site-Based," which consisted of both teachers and parents. The function of the committee was to consider issues that interested parties brought to its attention and bring these issues before Mr. Dixon, who then communicated them to faculty and staff members. At today's meeting, Mr. Dixon mentioned a concern which had been raised at the February committee meeting. It related to student behavior in the hallways, gym and cafeteria. Because several of the wings at Eastside were built without adjacent hallways, children had to actually walk through some classrooms to get to classrooms further back in that wing. "Site-based" had raised a concern about the noise level present when this occurred, and Mr. Dixon advised the faculty, "When going through halls and open rooms, make sure your students are passing as quietly as they can." Concerning behavior in other areas, particularly in the cafeteria, he suggested, "I know that all children are different, but if we set expectations and follow through, they'll come along. It might take extra effort with some. If you could please go over and over with your kids the cafeteria expectations."

I was intrigued by the idea of having a "site-based" committee and wondered if and/or how the committee's presence had impacted the Eastside community. Stan Karp (1994), an English teacher, writes that site-councils such as the one at Eastside can vary greatly in their effectiveness. He states, "They can become places where members of a school community try to reconcile different perspectives and priorities, and learn to build mutual trust and respect over the long term, or . . . they can consume valuable time and energy in a seemingly endless cycle of unproductive meetings . . . promoting old antagonisms rather than new alliances" (p. 163). The site-based concerns raised at

Eastside today represented the needs of both teachers in classrooms and staff in the cafeteria.

Just before the larger faculty meeting broke into "grade level meetings" today, Mr. Dixon announced to everyone in attendance, "If a group of teachers would like to get together to develop a faculty meeting and run it - they can." Most of the teachers looked puzzled at his statement; some looked surprised. Mr. Dixon added, "This is your opportunity!" To my knowledge, none of the faculty members ever took him up on this offer. Nonetheless, his offer presented them with the opportunity to assume control of and responsibility for guidance of the faculty as a whole in a meeting situation. He was, in this sense, opening a place for "shared authority" amongst the Eastside faculty members.

At the conclusion of today's meeting, teachers divided into smaller groups around the library. Sarah and Kelly joined with Mrs. Randolph and Mrs. Emory, the other two second grade teachers, whose classrooms adjoined along the back lower level of the building. Sarah began by addressing Mrs. Emory, *"All right leader, what do we need to talk about?"* The conversation that followed focused largely upon scheduling China activities that would impact all four second grade classrooms. When could they get children from each class together to form a Chinese dragon parade in the gym? Could they march the parade through other classrooms, displaying the masks, kites, flags and posters that the children had been creating? Either Mrs. Emory or Mrs. Randolph suggested 1:30 on a Friday for the event, but Sarah asked if they could try another time, explaining, *"Our kids will have a fit if they miss Fun Friday."* I learned that neither Mrs. Emory nor Mrs. Randolph held Fun Friday activities with their students. Ultimately the four teachers decided upon an alternative time. As they concluded their discussion about the parade, Sarah consulted Mrs. Emory, *"How did you do the parade last year?"* and *"Is there anything else that Kelly and I need to know in order to prepare for it?"* Sarah also suggested to the other teachers, *"Next week at faculty meeting, let's announce if anyone doesn't want us to march through their room to let us know."*

After discussing a couple of other culminating China projects, such as the creation of T-shirts with Chinese symbols on them and arranging for an afternoon kite fly, the conversation turned towards upcoming all-school activities that the teachers needed to be

182

aware of. When Sarah mentioned that the DARE officer would visit tomorrow, someone added that there would also be an all-school ballet to attend in the morning. Both Sarah and Kelly seemed surprised to hear this, and Kelly volunteered to check on the time in the office.   Just as Sarah remarked, *"Why doesn't anyone tell us in advance?"* one of the teachers added, "And there's a puppet show next Tuesday." At that, Sarah's expression shifted from a look of frustration to a look of determination. She told all of us, *"Who is in charge of this overscheduling? I'm writing a note to site-based!"* Mrs. Emory replied, "I'm on site-based." Sarah told her, "I'm writing a note to you!" Mrs. Emory told her, "OK, and just write ditto, ditto, ditto." Sarah read her note aloud as she wrote it down (See Figure 14).

> Site Based:
>   I am feeling that there are too many things scheduled - programs, assemblies, etc., that are interfering with our teaching. I am feeling totally overwhelmed and my children are disoriented due to interruptions that do not relate to our instruction. Please help!
>   Sarah Rhea

Figure 14. Sarah's note to the "Site-Based" Committee.

When she came to the word "overwhelmed," Mrs. Emory remarked, "Overwhelmed . . . did you put the word overwhelmed?" As she finished, Sarah appeared to be somewhat energized by her note-writing. The four teachers determined that their business was finished, and Mrs. Emory and Mrs. Randolph got up to leave. After the others left, Sarah and Kelly discussed possible ways to revise tomorrow's schedule to make room for the DARE officer and the all-school ballet presentation.

Sarah's actions and words during this afternoon's meeting reflected the positive, pro-active stance that so often characterized the way she dealt with concerns. When the suggested parade time had conflicted with Fun Friday, she requested an alternative. When interruptions threatened the continuity of her students' learning, she wrote to the committee that had been established to receive such concerns. And because tomorrow's plans would be inevitably interrupted, she didn't leave the meeting until she and Kelly had discussed how they might adjust their schedules to accommodate the changes.

March 6, 1997. Today I learned a little bit about the experiences and ways of

perceiving life that several of Sarah's students brought into the classroom. Early in the afternoon Sarah initiated P.N. time, and I listened thoughtfully to contributions that various speakers made. Jonathan began by sharing about a basketball game he had played in, and Meredith told us that she had been in a dance recital. Vincent went next, stating, "My brother is coming home with my sister for a visit. He's staying for four days." Sarah told me later that his brother had recently been released from prison, and that she hoped the visit would be a positive one. Regina offered an announcement as well, telling us, "My mom got married yesterday to a boy named Charles. My uncle married them at Emmanuel Church." Vincent and his mom had attended the wedding. Regina seemed cheerful and confident as she made her announcement.

Alton also shared during P.N. today. He stated, "My dad is coming to visit from New Jersey on Monday. He's staying for four weeks." Sarah asked him, *"Could he come here for lunch one day?"* Alton replied, "Maybe, if he's in a good mood. If he's in a bad mood, he'll come tear it up." Sarah told me later, *"I hope Alton's visit with his Dad goes well. He's never here. Alton's mom has told me that if you want to make Alton afraid, just mention his dad."* Sarah added that this was the first time Alton had ever shared during P.N. She explained that she kept track of those children who participated, in order to try to call on varied people each week. Sarah's presence in the classroom was characterized by listening. Mike Rose (1995) shares comments made by students of teacher Bonnie Tarta. When asked what they thought of her, students praised her highly. One explained, "She actually listens to students" (p. 143). I sensed that Sarah listened to her students as well, carefully and thoughtfully.

March 7, 1997. Although Sarah has expressed that the majority of her students are now regularly acting as positive, responsible learners and community members, scattered episodes are still occurring which represent contrasts to this overall pattern. As the day progressed, both Vincent and Alton seemed agitated and distractible. When Alton was asked to place the China research books in the chalk tray, he slammed them into place noisily, and became quiet only after Sarah set the timer for a one minute cool down period. During a Math skills test, he refused to participate, and instead sat kicking his desk, glaring and pouting. When Math group work began, he wandered to various center displays around the room until Sarah reminded him, *"You can do Math now or*

during Fun Friday. It's your choice." As the class lined up to leave for a special presentation in the gym, Alton tore down the folder that held the girl's bathroom pass cards. Sarah asked him to repair the folder with me before proceeding with the others. As Alton finished his repairs and prepared to rejoin the larger group, Vincent returned to the classroom by himself. Sarah came back briefly, as well, to explain Vincent's return to me, *"He went right into the gym and misbehaved. I told him, 'You have a choice - you can either sit down and pay attention or you can go to Mrs. Campbell's room."* He had refused to sit down. Because Mrs. Campbell's class was out of their room, I stayed with him for the duration of the special program. Later when Fun Friday occurred, Vincent was ineligible to participate, so he and I worked on his China project for the remainder of the afternoon.

After school, Sarah mentioned that she wondered whether or not Alton and Vincent were upset because of the upcoming visits at home from Alton's father and Vincent's brother. Her awareness of the anxiety they were likely experiencing created a dilemma for her as a teacher. In her work, Teacher as Stranger (1973), Maxine Greene wrote, "The more sensitive teachers are to the demands of the process of justification, the more explicit they are about the norms that govern their actions, the more personally engaged they are in assessing surrounding circumstances and potential consequences, the more 'ethical' they will be; and we cannot ask much more" (p. 221). Reflecting Greene's description, Sarah was aware of at least some of the circumstances that impacted her students' lives; she displayed a good deal of sensitivity and acceptance in her ways of relating to children who were experiencing difficulties. Yet Sarah also expressed to me her belief that, as Clark (1994) suggests, regardless of extenuating problems, we serve students best by "requiring them to function as learners in an academic setting" (p. 127). Considering Sarah's classroom practices as a whole, she tended to attempt to build each student's sense of stability through positive interactions and support, while at the same time she upheld consistent academic and behavioral requirements, at least for the most part. Today's events with Alton revealed an exception to academic requirements. When Alton had resisted taking his Math skills test, Sarah had not required him to do so. Instead, she had redirected his focus towards Math during group work time, a less threatening activity. I recalled her statements from earlier in the school year concerning

"picking her battles with Alton" and focusing on *"his biggest issues"* at any given time. I guessed that today's events reflected this.

March 12, 1997. When I arrived this morning, I noticed that the seating arrangement had once again been reorganized. At this point, Vincent and Alton were sitting at single desks, Anthony, Evan, Regina and Sereita formed a team, and Christy, Chip, Meredith, Erin, Jonathan and Ronnie formed the other team. During lunch break, Sarah mentioned to me that Chip had commented to her earlier this week, "The Black kids are all at one table. Don't they want to sit with us?" Sarah explained that she had responded, *"That's true. Those are the people they chose to sit by, just like the kids at your table chose who they wanted to sit by."* Sarah told me that before Chip had made this remark, she hadn't realized how racially segregated the class teams were. She stated, *"I'm thinking now that either that's really bad, or maybe it means that I just don't think about whether they are Black or White."* Vivian Paley (1995) describes her own experience with allowing children to select others to sit next to. Paley writes, "I think of the second graders who come to visit us regularly. The older children come in to read to the younger ones. Normally their teacher and I pair the children in advance, but last year we let them come together spontaneously. As if guided by an unseen hand, her two Asian boys went directly to my Asian boys, though they were all from different countries, and my Black girls sat beside her Black girls" (p. 103). Sarah's students had likewise "clustered" themselves by race, at least at this point. On several other occasions this year, though, when the kids had been given opportunities to choose teammates, the resulting groups had been racially mixed.

Recently, several situations occurred during which Sarah's students selected friends of a different race than their own. During center sign-up today, Alton and Christy consulted each other concerning what center "they" would pick. When I circulated the room, stopping to chat with them at the Math center, Christy told me, "He's helping me." Sarah later mentioned that the pair had worked and played together on several occasions this week when offered the chance to choose partners.

Chip, on the other hand, had made negative remarks about Black children on more than one occasion recently. When greeting the group this morning, another teacher had planted kisses on several children's heads and remarked, "I love to kiss heads!" Chip

186

made the comment, "Even the Black kids?" Sarah quickly told him, *"That was ugly,"* and moved his clip down. In addition, Sarah described to me an incident that had occurred concerning school breakfast one morning. Chip normally ate before leaving for school, but this particular morning his mother had given him money to buy breakfast at Eastside. When he had arrived at school, however, Chip had told Sarah that he didn't want to go to the cafeteria, because he had noticed that the group that went to breakfast was largely comprised of Black kids and he was afraid that they might "beat him up." Sarah told me, *"I wasn't sure whether or not he'd even been to breakfast before, and I assured him that I had been on breakfast duty several times before, and that the kids in the cafeteria had been well behaved and done just fine. I asked him if he'd like to take a friend with him, and he wanted to, so he and another boy went to breakfast together."* Sarah explained that when he returned to class later he didn't say anything further about his time in the cafeteria, so she had assumed that no major incidents had occurred. Sarah recognized that Chip was keenly aware of issues of race. Sarah seemed to address his concerns by both dispelling fears and showing no tolerance for hate. At the same time, she provided all of her students with at least some opportunities to freely choose their teammates and co-workers across learning situations. Sometimes her students segregated themselves by race; other times they did not.

March 21, 1997. Earlier this week, the practice of moving children's clips on the 4-3-2-1 chart was slightly revised. Sarah introduced to her kids the possibility of having their clips moved "up" whenever they did something *"kind and caring"* for someone else. Sarah explained to me how the new system would work, *"So, if Ronnie says, 'Here, you may borrow my pencil,' or 'Let me do that for you . . . '* his clip would be moved up one point. If students had already reached the "4" card when they did something kind, Sarah could move them to "5" or higher by pinning clips to the specified number printed on the number line that ran across the board directly above the chart. The new policy was less like a rule, more like a vantage point from which to consider what they were doing with others. Paley (1992) describes a similar perspective she held when putting into practice the guideline, "You can't say you can't play," in her classroom. She writes, "Our new rule is different. It gives us a useful perspective from which to view our actions" (p. 114).

This morning, Sarah provided the kids with specific examples of acts of "kind and

caring" or "considerate behavior" that they might consider. She described, *"Like when Anthony saw someone drop books and helped pick them up, and like when Evan saw Mrs. Beyers about to drop water and helped her before she even had to say anything. That's considerate behavior."* It was interesting to observe specific acts of courtesy that the children performed throughout the day. Meredith made Anthony a birthday card. Erin helped Chip with a Math problem that he was having difficulty with. Vincent worked out a way for himself and Meredith to view the same page in a book, while creating drawings of an Egyptian mummy case that the book portrayed. It was Alton, though, who seemed to outdo everyone. When Evan had difficulty drawing a sphinx, Alton, who was quite talented artistically, helped him make an outline of a sphinx. Realizing that Sarah desired to have a broad assortment of pictures related to Egypt to display around the room, Alton drew not one or two, put seven pictures for her. Later he volunteered to help a peer in Math.

Late in the day, when Sarah called out the names of those who could attend Fun Friday and included Alton, he appeared to be thrilled, telling the class, "FINALLY, I made it to Fun Friday!" Interestingly, however, when the Fun Friday celebration ended and the children returned from Kelly's classroom to prepare to leave at the end of the day, Alton seemed like a different child. As Sarah did P.N. with the kids on the rug, he interrupted on several occasions, even after Sarah asked him to listen. When Sarah asked him to move his clip, he stormed about the room and knocked his chair onto the floor. When she asked him to put the chair back in place, he clattered it around a good bit before doing so. Sarah commented, *"Don't blow it. You've had such a good day,"* just before Alton's bus was called and he left. Thinking about Alton's actions later, I considered the dilemma that Sarah had talked about in the fall concerning the use of rewards such as Fun Friday for good behavior. Alfie Kohn (1993) poses a question that addresses this dilemma, "Do rewards motivate people? Absolutely. They motivate people to get rewards" (p. 67). But do they detract from intrinsic motivations for change? As Sarah had hoped earlier in the year, the need for external motivators had diminished to some degree. Listening coupons and team points were rarely offered, and I had not heard the children mention the need for them at all. The timer was no longer used frequently. The use of "kind and caring" points, however, was still utilized, with Fun

Friday as a reward. Sarah talked to me about her hope that extrinsic motivators could be dropped over time,

> *"I think this is what John and I had talked about, that they needed more of these little structures and guidelines holding them together, and then as we have gone through, they're not going to need as much of those. So the fact that we could drop several of those or not rely on them as heavily is good. That means they're taking more self-responsibility and not needing it as much. They still seem to be needing the points, but I don't talk about it as much."*

This evolution from extrinsic standards and consequences toward intrinsically motivated behaviors seemed to be a slippery, risky business. Would the starting point deter from the point to be moved towards?   In Sarah's classroom, the jury was still out concerning this question.

March 26, 1997. Today was Career Day at Eastside. When I arrived, Sarah's and Kelly's classes had rotated to a classroom near the library where they were listening to an exterminator talk about his line of work and viewing the insects in jars of preservatives that he had brought to display. As the day progressed, our group also cycled through sessions with a television sportscaster, two mounted police officers, a veterinarian, a representative from the U.S. Navy, and a lawyer. The kids were listening, appearing attentive and interested throughout most of the sessions.

During our session with the Navy representative, late in the day, Alton appeared restless and fidgety. As I had seen Sarah do on several occasions, I asked if he would like to sit on my lap. He did so, and I was amazed at how calm and attentive he became for the duration of the session. Later, I considered Sarah's continuing willingness to provide a sort of "mothering" to her students - she frequently hugged shoulders, kissed foreheads, offered a lap to restless children, and checked for fevers or scraped knees and elbows. The kids seemed to soak up her attention eagerly. Although in the fall Alton had resisted Sarah's efforts to comfort him, recently I'd observed the calming effect that her hugs seemed to sometimes have, even in his angry moments. I recalled an experience that Peter McLaren (1989) described, involving Mickey, a third grader whom he had first seen "running and swearing after a police cruiser carting one of his brothers off to jail" (p. 108). When Mickey appeared at school crying one day, after being beaten by an older child, McLaren comforted him. He writes,

"I drew him close to me, and it was the only time he didn't push me away. While I wiped the tears from his eyes, I began rubbing his back slowly, rhythmically. His tight little face began to relax as I stroked his damp forehead soothingly and told him to take a deep breath. He sighed, and slowly the frenzy melted away. His shoulders loosened, then he crawled up on my lap and fell asleep" (pp. 143-144).

McLaren adds that, "Oddly enough, my kids just went on quietly with their work, and no one disturbed us." In a similar fashion, never once did I hear any of Sarah's kids complain when another received a hug or back rub. Often, however, others would hasten to her for their turns.

Our final Career Day session this afternoon involved a meeting with a lawyer. It wasn't until we returned to Sarah's classroom for this session that the kids recognized Sarah's husband, David, as the lawyer they would be hearing from. They were noticeably excited. Several called out, "It's David!" as they entered the room, and one child ran to Sarah's desk to retrieve a photograph of Sarah and David together to confirm his identity. The most memorable thing about our session with David, however, was how he utilized Evan to provide the kids with an example of a "law case." Building on Sarah's ongoing rivalry with Evan concerning their favorite NFL teams, David asked if Evan could be sued by Sarah for saying the "D" word (Dallas) too many times in class, if she told him that he owed her money for doing so. After a group discussion, concerning how a lawyer considers evidence, witnesses and the law, David assured Evan that he would owe no money. Evan seemed to love the attention, teasing with Sarah and asking David questions throughout. Sarah was also excited about how the event went, mentioning to me later, *"David and I worked out the whole thing for Evan, and it was just wonderful. Evan thought that was so cool."* This event signaled to me how supportive David was of Sarah's work with her kids.

April 4, 1997. Following a Spring vacation that spanned from Good Friday through the following Wednesday, the children returned to school. I observed during their second day back in the classroom. During the afternoon, Sarah initiated "Writing Workshop" by placing on the overhead projector an essay she had written yesterday while the children began their own essays, all related to the theme, "You'll never believe what happened to me over Spring Break . . . " Today's focus was editing, and Sarah

190

began by asking the kids to assist as she edited her essay. Her process was reflective of a belief purported by Donald Graves (1983), who states that, "Children need to hear the teacher speak aloud about the thinking that accompanies the (writing) process . . . how to start the piece, lining out, looking for a better word, etc." (p. 43). As Sarah read her piece aloud, she provided a running commentary that coincided with editorial marks she made, making statements such as, *"I'm not sure that's spelled right - let's put an 'sp?' by that word,"* and *"I need to add some description there."* As she proceeded, she invited the children to add input and included their suggestions in her editing.

After completing her editing sample, Sarah directed the kids to begin the editing process by revising their own essays, then to exchange their papers with a partner to edit, and finally to write their name on the board under the heading "Edit with a Teacher," when they had completed the first two steps. As the kids began working around the room, I checked on Vincent and Anthony, who had chosen to work as partners. Anthony was quite willing to edit Vincent's paper and read through the entire essay with apparent interest, marking things for Vincent. Vincent, however, was noticeably disengaged in the process and read through Anthony's essay with little effort or consideration. When each returned the other's essay, Anthony seemed frustrated with the lack of editing his paper had received and began to ask me questions, "What should I say there?" and "What's this supposed to be?" I worked with him for a little while and he seemed satisfied. At one point, Mr. Dixon walked into the room. Anthony picked up both the rough draft we had edited together and the final copy he was preparing and rushed over to show them to him. Mr. Dixon read the essay in its entirety, complimented Anthony and asked if he could add drawings to his final copy as he had done on the rough draft. Anthony assured him that he could.

Mike Rose (1995) writes of the sense of authorship that children in elementary teacher Stephanie Terry's classroom displayed when he visited them. He explains, "You couldn't be in her room for long before the children walked up to you, their dog-eared journals folded back, asking whether you'd like to hear a story" (p. 113). Anthony's concern for and pride in his story today were reflective of this sense of authorship. Vincent's half-hearted efforts, however, signaled his distinctly different perception of today's experience. On other occasions, though, I'd observed Vincent proudly reading

work that he had written. Perhaps today he didn't like his story topic, or wasn't in the mood to write, or was just disinterested in school activities in general; the reason was unknown to me. His actions support Donald Graves' (1983) description of writing is as "an unpredictable, up-and-down affair" (p. 273). Not every child will eagerly embrace a sense of authorship every day. My perception of the authorship taking place in Sarah's classroom on the whole, however, was more positive than negative. All of her students seemed to be excited about their writing at least some of the time, and many were eager to write most of the time.

April 11, 1997. When I arrived today, the class message board held a piece of typing paper on which was written boldly in Sarah's handwriting, "Welcome to a no testing day! Enjoy!" Sarah explained to me that all of the children at Eastside had been involved in standardized testing for the past three days. They were presently taking a break from the testing routine, but would continue with three additional days of testing next week. When I walked into the classroom, Sarah told me, *"We're SO happy not to be testing today."*

The kids were quite attentive throughout the events of the morning, which included a Science activity which Sarah referred to as "the oobleck experiment." Sarah explained to the kids that they would be considering the properties of solids and liquids, as they had discussed earlier in the week. She then read to them the Dr. Seuss book, Bartholomew and the Oobleck, asking them at the conclusion of the story whether or not they believed that oobleck was solid or liquid. Most of the kids told her that it had to be liquid and Sarah asked them why they thought so. Meredith answered, "I think it's liquid because it changes shape by itself." Sarah replied, *"Good. So you're considering the properties of liquid."* Jonathan then said that he agreed with Meredith. After several responses, Sarah asked for a vote. All voted for liquid. She then told the kids, *"Right now, your hypothesis is that oobleck is liquid. Today we'll be doing some experimenting with oobleck, and we'll see if you still think that then."*

When the time came for the oobleck experiment, the kids selected partners and played with oobleck which Sarah had created at home and transported to school in zip-loc bags. She described their task, *"Experiment a little, open your bag, take it out, put it on the paper. Ask yourself, 'Does it flow like water does? Does it stretch on its own? Then,*

on one side of your paper, put SOLID and on the other side, put LIQUID. If you think it's
hard or packed, write those words under the SOLID heading. If you think it's wet, write
that under the LIQUID heading." Sarah added a few rules that specifically related to the
activity, explaining, *"You may laugh about it or enjoy it, but, you know my rule, if you get*
out of your seat or get too wild, oobleck gets put away." She then questioned the kids
before beginning, *"Does it go on people?"* Several responded, "No." *"Do we throw it?"*
"No." *"Do we eat it?"* Many kids answered loudly, "NO!"

The kids handled the oobleck experimentation remarkably well, with no major
problems to speak of. Once finished, they determined that the oobleck was both solid
and liquid. They provided characteristics which Sarah added to the chart on the board.
The completed chart is represented in Figure 15.

<u>SOLID</u>   <u>LIQUID</u>
Hard   Moves by itself
Could not see through   Jiggily
Stiff - held still   Flows together
Smooth   Slimy
Dry   Wet
Had weight   Had weight
Had green and white

Figure 15. The children listed characteristics of "oobleck" that were classified as solid
and liquid.

Sarah explained to me that throughout the next few weeks she hoped to engage
the kids in Science experiments which were interactive and interesting. Ayers (1993)
writes that, "Curriculum is more than pieces of information . . . it is an ongoing
engagement with the problem of determining what knowledge and experiences are the
most worthwhile" (p. 88). Although she never directly stated it, I wondered if Sarah
hoped to relieve the students of the pressure and tediousness of the standardized testing
by providing them with opportunities to interact and work with hands-on activities,
experiences that she deemed as "worthwhile" balances to the testing situation.

In addition to Science, Sarah was attempting to continue with read-aloud and
independent reading times throughout the testing weeks. She told me that when they had
to miss their independent reading time due to testing one day earlier in the week, several

of the kids approached her and asked why they hadn't done it. Sarah explained that their question encouraged her, *"I thought, 'Oh, that's good for them to miss it.' They wanted to do it. Considering in the beginning of the year, you know, when I felt like I was tying them down, physically forcing them to do independent reading! I thought that was good; I think we've progressed."* During today's independent reading time, Sarah announced to the kids, *"I was reading as I got ready this morning, and it was so good that I brought it. I'm going to be reading on the rug. If anyone wants to join me, they can."* While several students positioned themselves near Sarah with their own books, others spread out around the room. I listened to Erin and Anthony, who were taking turns reading pages from a book about Santa Clause that Erin had brought from home. Because of her familiarity with the text, Erin had a solid command of the words. When Anthony accepted her help in a couple of places, she seemed noticeably pleased with herself. Erin's reading behaviors today reflected the distinctive development that had occurred across the course of the year for her as a reader.

On the whole, the mood in Sarah's classroom was positive today, with numerous episodes of cooperation and interaction. One exception occurred when it came time for Sarah to go outside for kite flying with those who were eligible for Fun Friday. As she read down the list of names, sending those who had accumulated 20 points or more to line up, Sarah came to Vincent's name and said, *"You have 19! I just can't stand it. Would you have a burning desire right now to wash the board to do something kind and caring?"* Vincent popped out of his seat quickly and nearly ran to get the sponge and begin washing the board. As Sarah continued through the list of names, she made statements to both Anthony and Alton that were similar to the offer she had mentioned to Vincent. Their responses, though, were different. Anthony muttered that he didn't want to do anything, and then added that he would clean his desk, but that was it. Alton just sat silently, with a glaring expression on his face. Soon Vincent had completed the blackboard washing, and Sarah asked him, *"Where do you want to go for Fun Friday - outside or to Mrs. A's room?"* He chose outside. When neither Alton nor Anthony had budged after a minute or so, Sarah proceeded to take the group outside, while I stayed with the two boys.

By this point, both boys appeared to be extremely angry. As the group headed out

194

the door, Alton kicked his desk over. I sat down in a desk near the boys to observe what might occur next. After a couple of minutes, Alton picked up his desk, waited a few seconds and kicked it over a second time. Again we all sat silently, and eventually he picked it up. Anthony then told me, "I hate Fun Friday!" Because Sarah had suggested that we might straighten the room while the others were outside, I asked the boys if they would like to do so. I was quite surprised when both agreed to. Alton was fascinated by the staple remover and willingly took down materials from a bulletin board, and Anthony began by washing his own desk, and then rotated around the room washing the desks of classmates. By the time the group had returned from Fun Friday, Anthony had completed the majority of desks in the classroom, and Alton had taken down all of the bulletin board materials and had straightened the bookshelves in the rug area. This incident impressed me. Although Alton and Anthony had openly resisted the opportunity to work for points and obtain the Fun Friday privilege, they both readily agreed to make positive contributions when no external reward was at stake. Given the pride in their faces when Sarah returned, it appeared that their actions had provided them with an internal sense of satisfaction.

April 16, 1997. Today the class message board held a note that read, "Welcome to a super testing day!" As had occurred with the class interruptions in early March, even though Sarah's feelings towards standardized testing were not positive, she attempted to frame the situation in positive terms when addressing the kids and did not reveal her negative feelings to them. When children weren't present, however, Sarah described her opinions about standardized testing differently, *"Testing has been just a nuisance, because we don't like it. And we're exhausted and that makes the rest of the day a little harder."* She added, though, that her children seemed to be coping well with the tests on the whole. Even Alton, whom she described as having never before managed to take an entire section of a standardized test without protesting angrily and refusing to finish, was managing to get through the process. Sarah described his testing history, *"His permanent records show zeros and one percents or something like that* (for his standardized test scores), *because his booklet gets turned in, and he's done only one or two before he's gotten angry . . . But yesterday, walking around watching, I said, 'This is amazing. He'll get scores and everything and do fairly well. In terms of adding to his progress, that is a*

step he's certainly made."

Today I helped Kelly monitor her testing, because Sarah already had help. Kelly mentioned to me that she and Sarah had talked about how their kids may be somewhat disadvantaged in a standardized testing situation, because they were not accustomed to doing worksheets and assignments that were set up in a fashion similar to the test's design. At lunch when I asked Sarah for her opinion regarding the tests, she agreed that at present the kids probably were disadvantaged. She added, however, that she believed their kids would ultimately surpass their agemates, even in testing situations, given the continual opportunities that they were provided to read, write and research, all skills critical to higher level learning. A statement made by William Ayers (1993) aligns with what Sarah and Kelly told me. He writes, "If young children are to have a strong experiential base for future success in math and reading, they need many opportunities to work with blocks and puzzles, to paint and play games, to explore a wide range of books, to have stories read to them and to write in journals or diaries. The problem is that none of this will yield quick results on a multiple-choice test, none of it will show up the 'right way' or on time" (pp. 118-119). Ayers adds that, because of this problem, too often teachers revert to a "curriculum of work sheets and drill and skill" in replacement of activities and experiences that are most needed. Sarah and Kelly had not done this, choosing instead to continue with experiential learning and ample opportunities to read, research and write.

I was able to observe several instances this afternoon during which Sarah's kids participated in experiential, interactive learning activities. Late in the day, Sarah asked for volunteers who would like to be "actors" in the "molecule show." All of the kids except for Erin wanted to participate. Sarah told Erin that it was fine if she wanted to sit at her desk and watch, and that she was still part of the activity too. Earlier, Sarah had explained to me that the kids had become increasingly enthusiastic about Science this week as they continued to study matter. Monday they had participated in an ice cube melting contest, as an early learning experience that focused on solid, liquid and gas. After melting the cubes, Sarah had heated the water to demonstrate evaporation. Today's "molecule show" was to provide a concrete representation of what occurs during the processes of melting, freezing and evaporation.

Sarah placed a yarn circle on the rug and asked the "molecule actors" to step in, placing each child shoulder to shoulder, tightly packed within the space enclosed by the yarn. As she positioned children, Sarah asked them a variety of questions, *"Are we packed tightly?" "Is there air between us?" "Is there room to move . . . and are we moving?"* Sarah explained that each molecule was now part of a solid. Once this had been established, Sarah told the kids, *"Now a flame will come and heat us up. What do we do to start to deal with the heat?"* One child suggested that they would start to move. As the actors then moved slowly, spreading out a bit beyond the circle, Sarah called, *"Freeze!"* and asked them, *"Are we connected? Are we close?"* At that point she brought to their attention several properties of liquid, mentioning that their current positioning represented molecules in liquid form. Next, Sarah said that the heat would again be added and then guided the children to move out into the classroom, modeling the movement by skipping and dancing towards the chalkboard area. When she called, *"Freeze"* the next time, the children were scattered throughout the room. At that point Sarah again asked, *"Are we close?"* and *"Are we connected?"* Finally, Sarah guided the students back to the yarn circle in two stages, explaining that this would occur when a *"giant fan"* was blown on them. After the activity had been completed, Sarah reviewed the concepts they had demonstrated. When she came to evaporation, she asked, *"Where was the evaporation part?"* Jonathan replied, "When we were a liquid turning into gas." Sarah asked him further, *"Where were we in the room?"* Jonathan told her, "All over." Sarah confirmed that he was correct and explained to the class, *"That's how a gas looks. They're all over and not connected. So that's why we can't see them."*

Following the "molecule show" I circulated the room as the kids chose and began to work in centers. The array of activities they were engaged in was wide ranging. Christy and Chip had developed a Math game for themselves, tossing giant-sized paper "coins" into a yarn circle, and then counting up the money value of the coins that landed inside it to see how many "cents" they had scored. Alton and Jonathan were working at the computer, taking turns doing multiplication fact problems. Erin and Ronnie were at the microscope station, looking at one of Ronnie's hairs on a microscope slide. They also informed me that when you put a piece of styrofoam cup on a slide and look through the microscope, it looks like "little stars." Evan and Vincent were making long tubes out of

197

rolled paper and covering the ends of the tubes with tissue paper. Anthony was painting a picture, Sereita was reading, and Meredith was coloring with markers. Only Regina was not participating in centers today, instead sitting at her desk to complete last night's homework.

I noticed today, as well, that Sarah provided her students not only with opportunities to learn experientially, but also to express what they had learned by teaching one another. Middle school teacher, Linda Rief (1992), writes that her students have become articulate learners, "because they continually practice discussing what they know and how they know it . . . by sharing with her, their peers, and others" (p. 147). Likewise, Sarah's students were invited today to articulate their learning through teaching. During Math time, Sarah listed on the rolling chart a variety of subtraction problems, ranging in difficulty. Sarah then asked each child to select a problem that he or she would like to work themselves and then *"teach"* to their classmates. Sarah marked each problem selected with the initials of the person who would be working on it. As each child subsequently explained how to work his or her problem, Sarah assumed a distinct role among the group. Largely, she served to direct and redirect the attention of the class towards the peer who was teaching. Comments that she made included, *"Ronnie's is a hard one. Give him attention,"* and *"Freeze. Not all eyes are on Regina. I only see two sets of eyes on her. If Regina's teaching, all eyes on her as they are on me when I'm teaching."* Sarah's efforts confirmed the position of each child as both a teacher and a learner.

Later, during Inquiry, I was once again able to observe Sarah's kids as they assumed teaching roles. Several inquiry groups had completely finished their projects and papers, ready at this point to present their work to the class. Vincent took his turn as a presenter today. He walked to the front of the classroom and turned to face the group, holding up his football shaped book so that the audience could see it. Sarah prompted the class, *"All eyes on Vincent,"* and asked him to *"wait for eyes"* before starting. Once the class had given him their attention, Vincent introduced his book, noting its title and crediting himself as the writer and Alton as the "author," at which point Sarah corrected, *"I think Alton was the illustrator."* Vincent continued, sometimes glancing at written notes he had prepared in advance which guided him through the steps of his presentation.

His notes included directions such as: tell title, read book and ask for questions. Vincent read his book with enthusiasm. Sarah advised him to *"show the pictures as you go,"* which he did. At the conclusion of the reading, he asked the class, *"Any questions or comments?"* There were many responses, including remarks such as, "I like how your book is shaped like a football," and questions like, "Which team do you go for?" Christy provided the final response, stating, "I want to compliment Vincent for his presentation and compliment the class for being good listeners." Sarah then asked the kids to give Vincent a round of applause and they did so. I thoroughly enjoyed observing Vincent as he presented his work. He was remarkably calm and poised throughout, answering questions with a professional air about him. I was most impressed, however, by the way he looked as he finished - proud grin, chest out, eyes shining. By teaching and presenting his understandings, Vincent was revealing how much he knew - to Sarah, to his classmates, and to himself.

April 25, 1997. An African American friend once told me that issues of race are a constant stressor. Race impacts every aspect of life for her. I was honestly surprised when my friend expressed this; yet her statement has come to mind on many occasions since that time, particularly when I've become aware of racial tensions that have impacted the lives of others. One of these occasions took place this week.

Sarah let me know that Mrs. Foster, Anthony's mother, had held a conference this week with the Assistant Superintendent of Valley City Schools, a meeting that she had requested in February when Anthony had been suspended from school. Apparently, Anthony's fourth grade sister, who attended Eastside as well, had also been suspended from school recently because she had hit another child. Mrs. Foster brought before the Assistant Superintendent her belief that neither of her children would have been suspended if they had been attending a school which was run by a Black principal who was not prejudiced. In addition, she explained during their meeting her desire to move her children to a different elementary building within the school system next year.

Mrs. Foster's statements were somewhat startling to me, particularly because they were quite similar to remarks that Evan's mom, Mrs. Roberts, had made when talking with Sarah back in March. Their talk had been precipitated by a string of encounters that Evan had with Mr. Dixon during the time period when Evan was supervised in the gym

prior to the opening of school each morning. Apparently, Evan had repeatedly left the gym to wander unsupervised, and Mr. Dixon had retrieved him and asked him to stay in the gym on each occasion. Sarah described the conversation that she and Mrs. Roberts had shortly after these encounters occurred:

> *"His mother said to me, 'I'm going to move him to a different school next year. I don't like Mr. Dixon; I've not been pleased with him for three years. He's not Black. Evan needs to go to a different school.' And I said, 'Well, I'm sorry you feel that way. I think Evan's come a long way . . . and I think that one of the things that's helped is that you and I can talk . . . ' She said that I had done all that I could . . . but she still wants him moved."*

It was clear that both Anthony's and Evan's mothers wanted their sons to attend schools that had Black principals. I wondered why they didn't like Mr. Dixon. Although I did not know the history of their relationships with him, at least during this school year I had never sensed that he was unfair or harsh to either Evan or Anthony, or to any other child. I had observed that he upheld high expectations for all students at Eastside, and that he promptly addressed misconduct, particularly if the behavior in question posed any type of safety concern for any child. This occurred no matter whether a student was Black or White. I reflected, though, that this was just my perception, and that both Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Taylor, as African American single mothers of eight year old sons, perceived Mr. Dixon, Sarah and Eastside School through their own distinct lenses.

Thinking about what their perceptions might be based upon led me to consider an issue raised by Lisa Delpit (1995), who examines what she refers to as "the cultural clash between students and schools." Delpit notes that the students most likely to suffer or be unduly penalized in the majority of schools in this country are African American boys (pp. 167-169). She cites possible reasons for this clash or "mismatch," including school personnel's misunderstanding of learning styles, stereotypical or racist assumptions and expectations, and ignorance of community norms. Villegas (1988) adds to this consideration, maintaining that culturally diverse students' failure in school results from societal conflict and a struggle for power. I wondered whether or not Mrs. Foster or Mrs. Roberts perceived Mr. Dixon's dealings with their sons to be based upon misunderstandings, ignorance or even racism. I wondered if their frustrations resulted, in part, from a struggle for power that they experienced daily. Ironically, I was aware that

Mr. Dixon did not generally receive criticism for disciplining children harshly or unfairly, whether Black or White. On the contrary, Sarah and others described for me a "common" perception that John Dixon was *"for the child"* to the point that some faulted him for not being strict enough. Yet both of these mothers believed that their sons had been treated unfairly and were planning to find more just situations for them.   And both mothers had talked candidly to Sarah about their plans. I was struck not only by their concerns, but also by their willingness to communicate openly with Sarah regarding issues of race. I wondered if these women felt, as my African American friend did, that race impacted every aspect of their lives and the lives of their children.

April 29, 1997. As I entered the building this morning, I walked past a group of Sarah's students who were walking down the hallway on their way to the preschool classroom, where they would read to the younger kids. As they passed me, Alton called out loudly, *"Mrs. Murrill!"* and gave me a huge bear hug. Following this lead, I then received hugs from Jonathan and Anthony before heading for Sarah's room. It was Alton's hug, though, that struck me most. I remembered the beginning of the school year, when Alton sat in his desk with coat and hat on until lunchtime, not wishing to speak and pulling away when anyone approached him. Across the course of the school year he had begun to relate, to take risks, and to trust. I had not realized that such a distinct contrast in behavior from Fall to Spring had existed. Yet when Alton hugged me this morning, it didn't seem unusual or out of place at all. If he had done so last fall, it would have seemed out of character. Nancy Wheeler (1990), an elementary teacher, writes that "slow growth is often obscured by the dailiness of teaching" (p. 136). I wondered whether or not Sarah was able to perceive the steady growth of her students, given how close she was to their daily activities.

I asked Sarah about the present state of the class group as she perceived it. Her response was positive: *"David said that I have been coming home sanely at the end of the day. So that's good!"* She went on to provide specific evidences of progress that the kids had made, stating, *"Behavior-wise, overall things are going fine - no one is going to the office,"* and *"I feel like we laugh a little harder, and I've thought, 'That's a good sign!'"* Sarah added, *"There are still little things, sometimes, but you're always going to have little things . . . but they're working together better overall; they're getting along*

much better."

Given my own observation that recent growth within the classroom had been reflected most in the area of academic learning, it was interesting to note that Sarah spoke a good deal about progress in areas such as behavior, cooperation and relationships. I considered the significance of a statement she made, *"My main job this year, I think, has been to have these kids feel good about themselves. In order to get them to learn, the first thing I had to do was to get them to realize that they were good kids. Because otherwise, they weren't going to learn."* Reflecting upon her statement, I perceived that Sarah noticed how well the kids were working together and relating to one another, and how much they laughed - because these occurrences were evidence that the foundation for learning was becoming more solidly established.

Sarah was not the only individual who viewed the growth in her classroom along these lines. Sarah related to me an April meeting that she had held with John Dixon, during which they had discussed her group of students. She told me, *"He mentioned that he felt the classroom had become a very warm, supportive classroom."* His statement brought to mind assertions made by Mara Sapon-Shevin (1990), a teacher who argues that the central organizing goal in our schools should be the creation of communities of care and compassion, and that the primary obligation of educators is to assist in the realization of each student's full humanity. Both Sarah and John perceived Sarah's classroom as a place within which to learn not only academic knowledge, but also as a space within which each child could learn to view him or herself as a responsible, compassionate member of a community - and to act accordingly.

Sarah let me know, also, that she and John had once again discussed the possibility of "looping" with her kids into the third grade. She reported that John remained supportive of the possibility, but that a concern had been raised about the potential size of next year's third grade groups. She explained, *"At this point, he's thinking only two third grades next year with bigger classes . . . With 25 (students), it would really be kind of different. I think these kids that have special needs have made so much progress because they have had the small class, and there's somebody to work with them or you can get to them quicker."* Sarah added that John strongly desired to split next year's third grade into three groups with fewer students, but sensed that the city

schools' central administration may not be supportive. She stated, *"I think he would like to have three thirds. I think it's coming from downtown. The city will still approve funding for K-2 small classes, but then when they get to 3-5, they don't."*

This concern that Sarah and John expressed has also been noted by others in educational settings. In his book, <u>The Good Preschool Teacher,</u> William Ayers (1989) asked a pre-kindergarten teacher what she would change in education if she could. Her response was,

> "Numbers and money. There's always too many kids and always too few resources. There's no way we could do what we do without having a lot of skilled adults in the room . . . You know, it's interesting; I find especially with kids with disabilities, you *have* to have that time to spend with them. If I'm able to sit down with a child and develop that rapport *every day*, then they respond, and I can get a sense of what they're really capable of doing" (p. 94).

Through observation I was well aware of how important it was to Sarah, also, to build rapport with each of her students on a daily basis. I wondered about how her relationships with students might be impacted if the class were twice its current size. Sarah mentioned that John would make further determinations about class sizes and looping sometime during May.

May - June 1997: Refuting the Negative

> ***"As a teacher, I want people to have their voice respected, and I want to help people arrive at a sense of their value and worth. One of the reasons the whole politics of education is so upsetting to me is that there's this assumption - and you hear it explicitly or indirectly all the time - that the students who inhabit urban public schools are a kind of debris. I think my class offers a refutation of that judgment." (Steve Gilbert, in Rose, 1995, p. 181).***

As the school year came to a close, Sarah expressed her belief that her kids had grown a great deal over the course of time, both as academic learners and as classroom community members. I found it interesting that several teachers at Eastside were also beginning to take notice of the marked changes in some of her students and to comment on their growth. Given any opportunity to do so, Sarah was quick to praise her kids and proudly talk about them amongst other teachers. Her continuing descriptions of her group as smart, funny, *"great kids"* stood out to me in stark contrast to the negative

commentaries I have often heard from many public school teachers concerning their students. As Gilbert stated to Mike Rose (1995), I firmly believe that Sarah would have gladly held up her class as a "refutation" to the negative expectations and judgments that some connect with urban public school children.

Across the close of the year at Eastside, I became aware of not only those teachers who applauded Sarah's work and the growth of her students, but also those who vocalized their disagreements with her ideas and beliefs about teaching and learning. Nonetheless, Sarah was determined to strive for the best for her students, no matter the circumstances.

May 5, 1997. After school today, Sarah and Kelly received a negative pronouncement about their teaching through second grader, Lisa Franklin. Lisa, a student in another teacher's classroom, had recently admired the oobleck drawings that were hanging in the hallway outside of Sarah's room. When she later told her own teacher that she wished their class could also do the oobleck experiment, the teacher had reportedly responded to her, "No, we won't do that because it's a baby thing." Lisa informed Kelly that she had also asked her teacher about doing Fun Friday and had received a similar answer, "Fun Friday is a baby thing too." Ironically, Lisa confided to Kelly, "You know my brother, he's in seventh grade. He has Fun Friday too!" Sarah had laughed over Lisa's announcement about this older brother, but had been frustrated by her teacher's comments. Her discouragement reminded me of a teaching situation discussed by Mike Rose (1995). Rose writes that a group of young teachers who created a special program for underprivileged kids were referred to by resentful colleagues as "The Seven Dwarfs and the Brat Pack." Rose goes on to say that other teachers in the building told students that the new program was for "dumb kids" (p. 172). Rose asserts that "this sort of internal bickering is a common development" when teachers try new approaches with their students.

Sarah explained to me that one of her reasons for being so upset with her colleague's criticism related to the fact that she would quite likely be teaching some of this teacher's students next year, stating, *"She's telling her children that, and the children are telling their parents that, and we're going to have some of these kids next year."* Sarah and Kelly talked with John Dixon about the incident, asking what they might be doing that the other teacher could interpret as babyish. He counseled them not to worry

about their teaching or to feel that they had to change anything. He guessed that the other teacher might have felt threatened when one of her students conveyed, "We want to do what they're doing." Ultimately, neither Sarah or Kelly brought the issue up with the other teacher. Sarah told me later, however, *"That was hard . . . I think we're finding our place in the school, but I think it's been hard in the beginning."*

May 14, 1997. When I arrived this morning, I noticed that Sarah had left a large envelope at my table with a sticky note attached that read, "Leslie - FYI! Note the grade level. Kids don't know this yet! Sarah." I opened the envelope and found in it a page that listed Sarah's name as a third grade teacher at Eastside for the 1997/98 school year. Apparently, her plans to "loop" with her kids had been confirmed. When I asked her about it later in the day, Sarah explained that a letter would be sent out to her students' parents sometime during the next two weeks. Each family could then decide whether or not they wanted their child to remain with Sarah for an additional year or to request a different teacher. Based upon their responses, next year's class roll would be formed.

Sarah mentioned her concerns that several students might opt out of looping, for a variety of reasons. She wondered about Evan and Anthony, whose mothers had stated that they wanted their sons to attend schools with Black principals. Sarah told me that she often considered a question similar to one that teacher Cynthia Ellwood (1995) poses, "Can we teach *well* students of different ethnicities?" (p. 247). Ellwood adds, "How easy and damaging it is to make mistakes rooted in cultural ignorance" (p. 247). Sarah admitted to me that she wondered whether or not the boys would benefit more from an African American teacher. Yet she strongly desired to work with African American children in her classroom, believing, as Goodman (1992) states, that perhaps the most effective way to help children "work through preconceived societal views" and break down prejudices is to "help students understand the values and perspectives of people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds" (p. 148). Despite Sarah's desire to work with Evan and Anthony, however, she was not at all certain about whether or not their mothers would allow them to continue with her.

Sarah also mentioned to me that Alton may be leaving the group. Recently, resource teachers had talked with Sarah about the possibility of having him placed in a self-contained classroom for children with emotional disturbances. Sarah expressed to

me her concerns about the idea, explaining, *"I'm not sure that he's E.D. He seems to be able to control himself when he chooses to, and there has certainly been improvement since the beginning of the year."* Understanding Sarah's beliefs about including all children within heterogeneous classrooms, her response did not surprise me. Her comments reminded me of ideas shared by teacher Stephanie Terry who stated that although she admired the dedication of many special education teachers, she also knew how few children, Black children especially, ever left that track. Mike Rose (1995) writes of Terry, "She could not be the agent who sent an African American child to that fate" (p. 126). Like Terry, Sarah continued to resist the idea of sending Alton into special education. Nonetheless, Sarah realized that her own suggestions would be considered amongst the opinions of others in determining how to serve his needs within the public school system.

Finally, Sarah explained that both Jonathan and Christy may not loop with her into third grade because both would likely be invited to participate in the school's TAG program, for "gifted and talented" students. Sarah hoped, however, that both families might instead choose to loop. She clearly let me know that she valued diversity in the classroom across race, class and academic strengths. Her perspective aligns closely with that of First and Gray (1991), who write, "We don't believe in ability grouping, and we don't believe in tracking. Both practices sort children out, preparing them for different adult futures. We are committed to teaching all students the way gifted and talented students are taught" (p. 92). Sarah, a former TAG teacher herself, believed much the same.

May 16, 1997. Although I was not present at Eastside today, Sarah filled me in on an occurrence that she considered to be quite significant to the growth of the class group. She referred to the incident as *"the trust talk."* Sarah described for me the events that led up to the talk, *"They were getting in trouble every day in lunch, and I was tired of going down there and having this cafeteria lady yell at me, literally, which is what she would do, and say, 'Young lady, are you listening to me? I told you this before about your class.' . . . So there were several days that I had to eat with them. And I was driving home one day, thinking, 'What am I going to do about this?'* Sarah added that the cafeteria incident was one amongst several concerns that she had been thinking through

recently. She explained:

> *"Things were going extremely well in the classroom, but then I was realizing . . . Alton got in trouble in library, someone got in trouble in art, and one day I sent Evan and Anthony to deliver a message and some equipment and they got in trouble on the way back because they went in the bathroom and started playing on the doors. I found them there - I walked in and stood there and looked at them. And they turned around and didn't say anything. We walked all the way into the room, and they knew I was upset. And they knew they were wrong. And then, that same day, the P.E. teacher came to me and said, 'You've got to watch Anthony."*

Sarah admitted to me that she was not so much angry about the situations as she was disappointed in the children's choices of behavior. She explained to me her mental process of reflecting on the events, *"I thought, 'They know better.' And I was driving home thinking about this, going, 'What is it?' I thought, 'Why is this bothering me so much?' Most teachers would just leave, going, 'Oh, bad day.' Not give it another thought. And I end up stressing over it. So I started to think, 'It's because they broke my trust.'"* Sarah described her perception of trust, as it related to her students, *"I believe with kids, they need responsibilities, and they need to believe that I trust them. It has to go both ways. They have to trust me, that I'm going to be fair and consistent and teach them, and I have to trust them. And I thought, maybe sometimes they haven't earned that trust."*

To emphasize the importance of trust as central to the teacher/student relationship, Sarah decided to talk about it explicitly with her kids. She described for me what had taken place: *"We talked first about what trust was, and they all knew that.* (Then) *what did it mean if someone trusted you, what it means if your mom trusts you, and we gave examples. So then I related it to school and I talked about, 'If you were a messenger and I trusted you to do that, what does that mean?' And they were amazed. They looked at me like, 'Oh, we don't stop and go to the bathroom?'*

Sarah mentioned to me later that the aftermath of the trust talk was encouraging. She explained, *"It's been such a good phrase. I could say to my kids, 'You know, I'm trusting you.' Like when we did the assembly, 'I'm trusting you to be able to be polite when other classes are getting their awards.' They were very good. And I said to them, 'How will you show me that I can trust you to do this?' And they talked about their*

behavior.' Sarah added that later incidents in the cafeteria had been much more positive, with just an occasional slip-up. She explained:

> *"Things got much better in lunch. But we had one day in lunch when they had not done well. And I said, 'You know, I was trusting that I could leave you there. You have shown me that I cannot, and I will cancel picnics tomorrow and eat downstairs. That was Tuesday, and by Thursday I let them stay be themselves, and they got a compliment from the lunch lady, which was like the first ever! She said, 'Your kids were pretty good today.' I took that as, you know, the highest praise you could get! And I told them that and said, 'Picnics will start again.' And they were clapping, and Jonathan turned around and said, 'This means she trusts us. We've earned back her trust in lunch."*

Sarah was excited when Jonathan verbalized this connection for the class. She believed that her students were beginning to understand what it meant to earn and maintain her trust.

May 21, 1997. Earlier in the month, the Valley City Schools central administrative office distributed amongst all teachers within the school division survey forms that focused on the issue of discipline. Sarah explained to me that after filling out the surveys, the teachers at Eastside spent several faculty meetings discussing questions that the surveys raised. Sarah described for me her response to one of the questions: *"There were six questions, and the last question on the form was, 'What is the biggest issue you would like to see changed in our school - discipline wise?' And I wrote down, 'Teachers focusing on the positive, not the negative. And I showed it to Kelly. She said, 'Oh, I agree with that.'"* When the time came for the afternoon faculty meeting, John asked Sarah to take notes, explaining that he wanted to keep a record of what was discussed. Sarah talked with me about her role during the meeting, *"So I'm recording notes, and I was fairly quiet through the first five questions. But I noticed that the more we went, everything was negative. 'Bad, bad, bad . . . kids are doing this bad, and kids are doing this.' And one of* (the questions) *was, 'What do we need to do to help it?'* (Teachers at the meeting responded): *'We need to have a detention center, we need to have this, we need to do this.' Everything was punishment.* The general tone of the meeting at that point seemed to follow what Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) call "false premises upon which punishment is based." The premises that they describe include: 1. In order to make children "do" better, first we have to make them feel worse. 2. It is

more important to make children "pay" for what they have done than to "learn" from what they have done. 3. Children learn better through control and intimidation than through exploring the results of their choices in a nurturing environment (pp. 101-102). Sarah strongly disagreed with these premises.

Sarah expressed to me her relief when preschool teacher Sherry Taylor added a new twist to the conversation, asking the group: "What about preventative measures?" Sarah described her own response: *"I started to applaud, and I said, 'And positive measures . . . to build them up so the behavior does not happen.'* Sarah explained that Sherry went on to describe a community building program that she had been part of in an inner city preschool. Several teachers supported Sherry's ideas, nodding their heads in agreement as she talked. Others, however, were more skeptical. Sarah described,

> *"One said, 'Oh, that's very well and good, but you know, we still have hitting . . . that sounds perfect in an ideal world' . . . and they started again with 'Punishment, punishment, punishment - we need to do this' . . . so I said, 'You know, as I'm sitting here writing all of this down, everything we're listing is punitive. And I said, 'Look at our school. We have over 400 children. Most of the children are behaving most of the time. But we're not spending any energy on that. All of the energy we're spending are on those few that are misbehaving. That seems to be real uneven to me."*

As Sarah addressed the group, she noticed that Kelly, Sherry, and several other teachers were agreeing with her, adding comments that supported her assertion. Sarah continued with her discussion of the issue by talking about her own students:

> *"This year* (some of you) *have come to me about when my children were misbehaving. I know that I need to know that. I need to know that and deal with that in my room; I agree with that. But you haven't come to me when my children are behaving, and my children are behaving more than they're misbehaving. Something to me seems wrong about that . . . You know, I had two kids that came in at the beginning of this year, and they told me they were bad kids. That was the expectation that they had. And they thought, therefore, that they were going to act bad . . . But if we expect them to be good, then they can rise to that. It may take some longer than others to rise, because we may have to change their whole self esteem and attitude. If they really believe they're bad, we have to convince them they're good."*

Sarah explained that her comments received mixed reactions, *"Nobody said, 'You're wrong,' but you could hear people saying, "Well, that's wonderful and a little*

ideal thing, but . . .' But John chimed in and said, 'We have to recognize the good

behavior . . . that's our responsibility.' And Marty Johnson, (a TAG teacher)*, said, 'Oh, I*

agree with Sarah. If you walk in her classroom now and see how Alton and Evan are

working, you know what she's talking about works. It takes a long time, but they're trying

to change their whole way of thinking and their behavior.'"

Following the meeting, Sarah told me, *"I was so excited, I was like dancing out of*

the meeting . . . That was for me a turning point, because I felt that for the first time I had

said to this faculty what's important for me discipline-wise, and what I don't like about

them coming to me always and saying bad, bad, bad, and never recognizing the positive."

Later Mrs. Neff, who served not only as the Physical Education teacher but also as

Eastside's "team leader," asked Sarah if she might be willing to serve on the school's

discipline committee. Sarah readily agreed to do so and explained to me that the

committee would meet several times during the summer to plan discipline initiatives for

the next school year. Sarah added, though, that she hoped to plant a seed for a school-

wide positive discipline emphasis immediately. She explained, *"When I have bus duty,*

I'm sending little notes. I'll write, 'Your class did a wonderful job in the gym.' I'll sign it,

and I'll give it to the first person, telling them, 'Please give this to your teacher when she

comes to get you.' I'm just going to go ahead and start doing this. If no one else wants

to, fine. But think how good those kids would feel." Several weeks after the meeting,

Sarah reported to me that Mrs. Neff had begun complimenting her kids on various

occasions. She described, *"She came to my room one day and said, 'Mrs. Rhea, just*

wanted to let you know that these two boys who just came back from breakfast walked in

very quietly.' I said, 'Thank you very much!' We gave them a clip up, so they got a

positive. I said, 'Really proud of you guys.'" Sarah was encouraged by Mrs. Neff's

report. She believed wholeheartedly, as Ayers (1993) writes, that "we must move away

from teaching as a way of attacking incompetencies . . we must find a better way, a way

that builds on strengths, experiences, skills and abilities" (p. 32).

May 27, 1997. Realizing today that my time in Sarah's classroom was quickly

coming to a close, I spent a good deal of time "kid-watching" - observing Sarah's children

as they interacted with one another, worked through class activities, and simply lived

through their day. A memorable incident occurred during independent reading time,

when Evan and Chip collaboratively read through The Three Little Pigs. I remembered back to an occasion in November when I had read together with the two boys. At that point, they had frequently interrupted one another, argued and acted generally annoyed by the other. Today, however, their work together was distinctly different. They laughed out loud over funny parts of the story as they persistently worked their way through it. There were points when both boys stumbled over words in the text and appeared momentarily frustrated. Interestingly, however, there were several times when the boys helped each other, assisting with words and finishing difficult sentences for the other person.

Later in the morning, Sarah introduced a magnet activity to the class, inviting the children to choose their own partners to share a magnet set with. In passing out the sets, which she had borrowed from the TAG teachers, I listened to her explanations to the kids, *"I'd like you to do some gentle exploring with the magnets and write down what you find out."* She added, *"I'm going to trust you to clean up the magnets when the timer dings . . . and to keep them in their boxes after that."* After experimenting with the magnets for several minutes, I was impressed when all of the children put their sets away promptly after the timer rang. Sarah remarked, *"Some good choices being made!"* She then asked children to share what they had learned by using the magnets. Many of their observations reflected their growing understandings of the concepts under study. Anthony described how the metal strip he had placed near a magnet flipped over to attach to its opposite side. Jonathan added, "When you put the N from one magnet with the S from the other magnet, they will attract." Meredith explained that some metal pieces that stick to magnets become magnetic themselves. When I later considered the children's work across this activity, I remembered Sarah's discussion with me early in the fall. She had told me about her students' reactions to independent and cooperative learning activities, describing, *"The first and second day they kept saying to me, 'Where are our worksheets? Where is the real work? . . . They were kind of thinking, 'Oh, I don't have to be serious here; this isn't real work."* At this point, however, Sarah believed that her students' perceptions of what entailed academic learning had shifted over the course of the year. First and Gray (1991) write about the benefits of cooperative learning activities, such as the ones Sarah offered, "We do a lot here with cooperative learning . . .

Researchers find it a good way to enhance children's understanding, to extend learning to higher levels, and to foster children's leadership skills. Now we don't need research to tell us it works; we have seen the results with our own eyes" (p. 92).

Sarah's students were also taking on an increasing number of leadership roles within the classroom. Sarah mentioned to me that her kids were now regularly involved in *"doing their share of teaching."* In recent weeks, various small groups of children had constructed and led the class in spelling reinforcement activities. Erin, Jonathan and Regina had created a spelling concentration game, complete with sets of flash cards, for the class to participate in. Christy and Chip had come up with a spelling tag game that involved creating their own rules such as, "You can't fight," and "You can't stomp your feet if you get out." After playing the tag game, Christy had expressed to the class that the game had turned out to be a little more confusing than she had hoped. Sarah then asked the class to provide her with compliments and suggestions, and both were given. Jonathan liked the way they tagged people before asking them to spell a word. Meredith suggested that kids might take their spelling notebooks with them as they played. Sarah suggested that the taggers might write down in advance the words that they hoped to use during the game. Sarah believed that the class group as a whole seemed to be both familiar and comfortable with the practices of teaching and directing, as well as listening and responding to the teaching of their peers.

This afternoon, Meredith showed me the math "manipulatives" that she had created at home and secured in an envelope. The envelope had "Meredith's Plans" printed on the outside of it, as well as four markers taped to it. She had collected her materials in preparation for teaching fractions to a group of classmates. As Jonathan worked on the lesson that he would teach to the group, he commented to Meredith, "How am I going to teach them fractions?" Meredith's response was confident, "The same way that Mrs. Rhea taught us." Later she wandered over to my table and asked me, "What's it like to be a teacher?" I honestly do not remember how I responded to her, but I reflected later that no quick response could have possibly done her question justice. Ayers (1993) writes, "When we as teachers recognize that we are partners with our students in life's long and complex journey, when we begin to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve for simply being, then we are on the road to becoming worthy teachers. It is just

212

that simple - and just that difficult" (p. 139). Perhaps I should simply have told Meredith to consider Sarah's example. Sarah's daily work amongst her kids exemplified the kind of teaching that Ayers describes.

June 10, 1997. This morning Sarah's students collaborated with her to construct an alphabet acrostic that was titled, "Things We've Done in Second Grade." Although Vincent was absent, every other child in the classroom contributed to its creation. (See Figure 16).

The kids seemed to enjoy the activity immensely, engaging in light-hearted banter and giggling as they proceeded. When Sarah suggested, *"You are all great"* for Y, Evan teased her, "Mrs. Rhea, that's real cornball!" When the acrostic was completed, the children chose lines and read the poem orally. Their enthusiasm was apparent.

Things We've Done in Second Grade

A	Art	(Christy)
B	Babies	(Sereita)
C	China	(Chip)
D	Dinosaurs and Diamonds in inquiry	(Ronnie)
E	Egypt	(Alton)
F	Football and French	(Alton)
G	Geometry	(Jonathan)
H	Homophone	(Evan)
I	Inquiry	(Chip)
J	Jigsaw Puzzles	(Evan)
K	Kites - Chinese Kites	(?)
L	Learning!	(Jonathan)
M	Molecules	(Alton)
N	Never says no	(Jonathan)
O	Oobleck	(Anthony)
P	Projects	(Regina)
Q	Quick learners	(Meredith)
R	Rain	(Erin)
S	Science	(Ronnie)
T	Taught	(Meredith)
U	Understand	(Meredith)
V	Volcanoes	(Evan)
W	Wrote weather tall tales	(Jonathan)
X	Xx in Cursive!	(Evan)
Y	You are all great	(Mrs. Rhea)
Z	Zz in Cursive!	(Evan)

Figure 16. The "Things We've Done in Second Grade" acrostic compiled by Sarah and her students.

During lunch today, Sarah informed me that the majority of the children's "looping" responses had been returned. She explained that many came in immediately, including Christy's, Ronnie's, Sereita's, Chip's, Erin's, Meredith's, Jonathan's and Alton's. All of these children's parents had responded that they wanted their kids to loop with Sarah. Sereita's mother included a note that really encouraged Sarah: "I think this is a wonderful idea, and I'm very proud to have Mrs. Rhea in Sereita's schooling, because she has truly made a big difference in her school work and she's more aggressive than she's ever been." Although neither Vincent or Regina had returned their responses to her, Sarah explained that the forms for both children were still in their bookbags, unread. She planned to write notes on their final report cards in an effort to get the information to Vincent's and Regina's parents. Sarah had waited anxiously on both Evan's and Anthony's forms, wondering whether or not their delay in responding was reflective of their mothers' choices against the looping idea. But on the preceding morning, Evan had brought in a form that said, "yes." Sarah described what had happened when he showed her the form, *"I told him he made my day. He just grinned!"* Finally, this morning, Anthony's form had arrived. It also said, "yes." Sarah was surprised, but elated that both mothers had opted to let their sons continue with her. Vivian Gussin Paley (1995) writes that a parent of one of her African American students once told her that they desired to "seek out teachers at every grade who are able to promote the good spirit of every child" (p. 96). Sarah hoped that these mothers believed she was such a teacher.

This afternoon the children participated in what Sarah referred to as *"taking down the room."* On the board she listed a wide range of possible jobs, including "art cabinet," "calendar," "message board," "pictures," and "rules." She invited the children to select jobs to work on, permitting them to work in pairs if they wanted to do so. Before the kids began to work, Sarah challenged them, *"I'm trusting you to do well. I usually have fourth graders do the room, but you guys have done so much this year that I think you can do a good job. I'm trusting you."* The guidelines she suggested were, *"When you sign up to do a space, that's where you stay," "Be neat - don't leave scraps on the floor - make it look clean,"* and *"When you get done, go and sit and your desk and I'll know you're ready for a new job."*

Throughout the hour or so that followed, the kids participated enthusiastically in

their tasks. Some worked by themselves, while others, such as Alton and Christy, and Erin and Ronnie, chose to work in pairs. Sarah and I both moved around the room, helping kids with tacks and clips that were positioned high on the walls. Sarah agreed to play an audio-cassette that Chip had brought with home, a sound track from the movie, "Space Jam." When the tape came to the song, "I Believe I Can Fly," the entire class sang along as they took down pictures and putty, threw away trash and straightened cabinets. I felt privileged to be part of the camaraderie that I sensed amongst the kids. Late in the task, Alton and Anthony began to get distracted from their work, and Sarah asked them to choose between participating and taking seats. For the majority of the time, however, Sarah's kids handled their jobs responsibly and eagerly. Boyer (1995), in The Basic School, defines responsibility as a virtue that should be of central focus in elementary schooling, characterizing it as "each person having a sense of duty to fulfill willingly the tasks he or she has accepted or has been assigned. All work is conscientiously performed. Members of the community feel comfortable asking for help and agree that they must be held accountable for their behavior" (p. 184). At least for most of the time this afternoon, Sarah's students portrayed this virtue through their actions and attitudes.

June 11, 1997. Today I took part in the "last day of school picnic" at Eastside. Sarah's class played outside amidst many other groups. Sarah and her students ate fruit, brownies and cookies that mothers had sent, and signed autograph booklets and t-shirts for one another. A teacher reported that Alton started a fight with one of her students, and John Dixon asked Alton to tag along with him for a while so that they could talk about what had happened. Sarah and John learned later that Alton had not been the instigator of the fight. Sarah was glad that Alton had not blown his cool when the false accusation was made.

A couple of the children's parents arrived early to eat and then take their kids home. Shortly before dismissal time, Sarah announced to her class, *"I wish you all a great summer. I will write to you. Write to me. I'll see you in the fall!"* She then proceeded to give hugs all around as the children filed out to their buses. Because Bus #78 was running late, Alton hung around the front of the building longer than usual. He seemed noticeably upset, with an angry pout on his face, throwing little clods of dirt at a

215

tree. Sarah remained with him until the bus arrived, her arm on his shoulder as he lined up to step inside. John Dixon, who had been watching over Alton for the greater part of the morning, decided to ride the bus route home with Alton and his peers and boarded it with them. Sarah told me later that she wondered how Alton's summer might go. She knew that he would be visiting his father out of state for a significant amount of time and worried, remarking that this usually precipitated volatile outbursts for Alton. Considering the time and effort that Sarah had continually poured into her relationship with Alton, I wondered whether or not their time together would impact him in a lasting way. McLaren (1989) queries of his work with children who came from situations similar to Alton's, "I often wondered how much difference any of this would really make in empowering their lives" (p. 90). Sarah wondered this as well, particularly as it related to Alton. Despite her concerns, however, she had refused to give up on him. I guessed that she would continue to build this relationship across the course of the next school year, if given the opportunity to do so.

June 16, 1997. In a final interview with Sarah several days after school concluded, I asked if she could describe for me her closing thoughts concerning the school year with her second graders. She responded, *"I think for the first time I was forced to really focus on the kids' images of themselves and how that affected them . . . in order to get them to learn, the first thing I had to do was to get them to realize that they were good kids. Because otherwise they weren't going to learn. And that, if that's the thing I did, then that's the most important thing I needed to do this year."* Carter Bayton, a teacher in an inner-city New York school, expressed to Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997), "You have to reach the heart before you can reach the mind" (p. 19). Sarah understood this simple, foundational principle. The changes that occurred within her classroom community between September 1996 and June 1997 were extensive. Sarah believed that her children grew not only in the realm of academic learning, but also as increasingly confident, contributing members of this second grade learning community. As an observer, it was truly a privilege for me to witness this growth.