PART THREE: CONSIDERING

Robert Coles (1997) writes, “School is a place where a child first joins a particular community outside the family as a participating citizen - acquires knowledge, yes, but also assumes responsibilities” (p. 101). As the school year began, Sarah envisioned the establishment of a classroom community which would, indeed, involve each of her students as responsible, participating citizens. In our conversations prior to the opening of the school year, she talked extensively of her hopes that her students might, *"feel that what they have to say is important," "pursue (learning) that they are interested in," "learn to work together,"* and *"when incidents happen in the room, gather on the rug and talk (about) how we can learn to cooperate."* Sarah hoped to establish a classroom atmosphere which provided a balance between individual freedom and community values. She wanted to show students that she genuinely valued each one and his or her contributions; she also wanted students to value each other.

Apple and Beane (1995) describe a classroom atmosphere which aligns closely with my perception of Sarah's vision. They explain that the atmosphere is marked by "an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration rather than competition. People see their stake in others, and arrangements are created that encourage young people to improve the life of the community by helping others" (p. 10-11). Miner (1995) adds to this conception, describing a classroom where, "kids are respected and not oppressed, where they take responsibility, make choices, work in groups and teams . . . it's a mutually interdependent community of people" (p. 125).

When Sarah described to me her vision for classroom community, I sensed not only her enthusiasm, but also her commitment. As an experienced teacher, she brought a thoughtful passion to our conversations that went beyond visionary rhetoric. Mike Rose (1995) speaks of a teacher he worked with who referred to "community" as "something in process, something to be achieved" (p. 132). Sarah spoke about the development of community within her classroom as an "evolution." From my vantage point, as a participant observer, watching this evolution unfold was a rich learning experience. I observed in Sarah's work several patterns or "systems" of activity that characterized how she approached the development of community. First, Sarah's movement toward the possibility of a mutually interdependent classroom community was based upon a deep-

rooted belief in the worth and goodness of her students. Then, building upon this belief, Sarah provided her students with relationship based upon trust and respect, with structure that supported the development of moral intelligence and with opportunities for shared authority and collaboration.

Each of the next three chapters considers a characteristic activity system within Sarah's work. Following an "abductive reasoning" analysis process (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), I have attempted to locate these characteristic features of Sarah's work within explanatory or interpretive frameworks found in related literature. I have found that Sarah's lived experiences do more than merely exemplify existing conceptions of teaching and learning. Additionally, Sarah's work presents considerations, tensions and dilemmas that are unique to her position as a teacher of young children who are less materially privileged than many. Sarah's story also reveals the evolutionary process of her movement toward "democratic community" with these kids over the course of a school year.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOUNDATIONS: BELIEF, RELATIONSHIP AND EXPECTATIONS

Belief

Joan Wink (1997) writes that as a beginning teacher, "my colleagues were quick to warn me about all the 'problems' that I had received" (p. 10). In a similar fashion, Sarah was approached by several first grade teachers before the school year began and told that many of the students whom she would be working with were "behavior problems" and a "terrible group." Then, when school actually did start, Evan introduced himself to Sarah by announcing, "I'm bad. I've always been bad." That same week, Chip told Sarah that he didn't want to be in Alton's class, because "he'll hit everybody," and within a short period of time Alton proved this prediction to be true, even hitting Sarah.

In a November interview, Sarah explained to me that although a few of her students had responded positively to the choices, freedoms and activities that she had constructed in an effort to offer *"student-direction"* in the classroom during the beginning of the school year, the majority initially saw their choices as opportunities to play or to disrupt. She believed that most of her students had not yet known how to act as positive contributors within a mutually interdependent learning community. Cunat (1996) writes that elementary students she has worked with "are not sure what autonomy means or how self-determination in a classroom can work. It takes work and experience to develop an atmosphere of trust, respect, mutuality, reflection and responsibility" (p. 140). Sarah's experience with her students, particularly throughout the fall months, was one that required persistent work and real struggle.

In a June interview, Sarah reflected on her work with these children across the course of the year and described her focus throughout the fall as, *"learning how I needed to get them to somewhat feel good about themselves, and what I had to do to do that, and for some of that to start taking hold."* Aronwitz (1986) asserts that one aspect of empowering students toward positive action involves moving them toward appreciating

and loving themselves. Yet several of these students focused upon the "bad" in themselves and in others. At the beginning of the year, Sarah recognized that moving some of her students toward appreciating and loving themselves may be challenging. When Evan told 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," she wondered how she could get across to him the message that she believed he had much to offer within his new classroom. When Alton hit others and angrily called out during class time, "I hate you. You're ugly. You're a big fathead," Sarah thought about whether she could possibly get beyond the anger and violence he displayed and somehow express to him that she knew he could be a positive, contributing member of this community.

Sarah told me that she believed many of her kids' classroom behaviors were negatively impacted by low self-esteem that had been fortified, rather than challenged, during their previous school experiences. Cunat (1996) suggests that low self-esteem in a classroom can be connected to school structures, explaining, "There is rampant low self-esteem, apathy, fear and anger in almost all classrooms. These emotions result not just from students' difficulties at home, but from living with a school structure that denies respect, integrity and autonomy" (p. 140). While Sarah hoped to develop respect amongst her students and nurture integrity and autonomy, it was clear that several of her students were not anticipating this type of an approach in a school classroom. Thus, her work with her kids began with establishing a basic foundation. Sarah expressed openly to her students that she saw them as good. I remember hearing her make statements to them throughout the year such as, *"I've been bragging on you today,"* or *"I know you can be good - every one of you."* Her hope was that she might help her students rebuild their whole way of seeing themselves. A perception of self as capable, valued and worthy was needed as an infrastructure for the growth of each child as a contributing classroom community member.

Over the course of time, Sarah made sustained conscious efforts to convey positive messages to her kids about their self-worth. For example, when developing a class acrostic, Sarah's contribution for the letter Y was "You all are great!" Her emphasis on the worth that each child possessed was also reflected daily in the countless hugs,

smiles and words of encouragement that she gave to all of them. Sarah was well aware that her actions and words would impact their perceptions of themselves. Wink (1997) writes, "Even before children are reading words, they are reading us very well . . . they get the hidden messages we are sending even when we don't realize we are sending messages . . . students are socialized by the greater context; they are led to think in a certain way just because of what they see and hear in their environment" (p. 118-119).

Sarah's movement toward establishing a conception of her students as "good" was nothing short of relentless. As an observer I watched anxiously on many occasions, half-expecting to hear Sarah speak harshly to a child or "blow up" out of sheer frustration. When students talked disrespectfully to her and to each other, got up and walked around the room during instructional time, lost their tempers, and even acted with physical violence, I waited for her response. At times I could see the strain on her face, and I could sense the exhaustion she had to be experiencing. Sarah did not ignore disrespectful behavior; her room was not a "free for all." In fact, she and her students lived within and were expected to abide by community expectations, as I'll consider when I discuss the issue of structure. The one thing Sarah did not do, however, was yell. She did not scream at her children, and she never once attacked their self-worth in my presence. If Sarah felt that redirection was needed, she focused upon the behavior, the action that needed to be changed. Her focus upon the child as a person, however, was consistently positive, expectant and hopeful. During the fall months, when Donald struggled daily to focus and participate during class, there were moments when I felt certain that his continual activity must be challenging for Sarah to deal with. Yet she always seemed to find ways to channel his actions positively. When he pulled pictures off of the wall, Sarah told him later that she knew he could rehang them carefully and gave him a ball of putty so that he could do so. When he went through a phase during which he frequently wandered from his desk, Sarah not only talked with him about the need to stay seated, but also brought in a jar in which she could drop marbles to designate that she was noticing his good efforts in this regard. Both Sarah's words and her actions continually reflected a deep seated belief in her kids' goodness.

In part, Sarah's abiding belief in her kids was based upon her strong desire to

teach kids whom others may not have wanted to teach. She wanted to teach in a city school, fully aware of the low socioeconomic status of many of the families she would work with. She wanted to teach in a situation where students represented different racial backgrounds. She wanted to teach students of different academic abilities, rather than returning to the TAG program she had taught in for many years. Sarah *preferred* these kids; she wanted them to know that, *"Mrs. Rhea is interested in what they have to say and them."* Joan Wink (1997) writes that too often some children are considered the "trash track," which she defines as "the track that has been assigned less status, power and prestige. Who are the students who are placed in this track? Students from lower socioeconomic communities and ethnic minorities" (p. 121). Teacher Steve Gilbert, in an interview with Mike Rose (1995) adds that, "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" (p. 181). I believe that Sarah would identify with Gilbert's statement, hoping earnestly that her class might offer a similar refutation.

William Ayers (1993) poses a related question concerning teachers' perceptions of their students, writing about what a teacher might think about as she or he begins a new school year:

> "Who would this teacher see coming through the door? . . . When teachers look out over their classrooms, what do they see? Half-civilized barbarians? Savages? A collections of deficits, or IQs, or averages? Do they see fellow creatures? We see students in our classrooms, of course, but who are they? What dreams do they bring? What experiences have they had, and where do they want to go? What interests or concerns them, how have they been hurt, what are they frightened of, what will they fight for, and what and whom do they care about?" (pp. 26 & 28).

Sarah saw coming through her door what McLaren (1994) refers to as "teachable hearts," in the sense that she sought to, as Wink (1997) describes, "find an underlying current of the potential in each one" (p. 93). Her subsequent classroom actions and relationship building were grounded on more than just affect alone; moreso they revealed what Rose (1995) calls an "absolute regard for her children . . . an unfaltering belief in

their potential . . . (that has) as much to do with faith and cognition as with feeling" (p. 87). Sarah refused to accept the idea that her students were less or deserved less than any child in our society, including the "gifted and talented" children she had previously taught. She refused to lower her expectations of them, to see them as anything less than capable, worthy and bright, or to hope for their growth any less than she would hope for any other group of children.

Sarah talked with me, as well as with others, about her students' potential to learn. She explained to me, in an interview at the beginning of the school year, *"Their questions are important, and their ideas are important . . . and they all have wonderful ideas."* She talked about her kids in terms of what they could do, rather than focusing on their deficiencies. She worked with Erin as a *"blooming reader,"* and provided her with regular opportunities to build on her successes by reading to preschoolers. Vincent was viewed as an *"author"* and a *"presenter"* when he created and shared his football shaped book, offering him the chance to perceive his writing abilities in a successful situation. Alton became a *"teacher"* in the realm of artwork, creating sketches for the classroom, supervising an artwork center and assisting classmates with their artistic efforts on occasion. As Rose (1995) describes, Sarah's classroom was one in which "people were encouraged to be smart" (p. 416).

Further, Sarah recognized her students' contributions. Bigelow (1995) writes that "untracked" classrooms, such as Sarah's, best offer accessible learning opportunities to all students when "the environment is encouraging, even loving . . . all need to know that their potential is respected, that they are included in a community of learners" (pp. 155-157). Sarah actively sought occasions where she might publicly recognize and show respect for the unique contributions of each of her students. When Erin created a detailed, colorful drawing for her ancient China project, Sarah held it up for the class to see, telling the group, *"Erin did a super job with her picture."* When Alton worked hard on his cartooning project for Inquiry, Sarah admired it openly. When Jonathan authored his ABC book, Sarah not only read and complimented it, but also asked if he might want to share it with other audiences. Her perceptive knack for finding an avenue for success for each child is reflective of a conception asserted by Carini (1982). Carini organized a

study in which seven children were shadowed separately by teachers and researchers over the course of five years. Interestingly, at the end of the time period, Carini wrote, "For the teachers and observers who followed the daily school lives of each of these children, their particular child became unusual and fascinating . . . a 'wonderful child.'" She adds, "The overwhelming conviction of the professionals who followed the children that each of them, nonetheless, is remarkable carries the strong implication that all children are potentially special and valuable contributors to the quality of life in the family, the school and the community" (p. 15). Perhaps Sarah's perception of the unique potential of each child was due, in part, to the keen awareness of their interests and gifts that she gained by developing relationships with each one that went well beyond the superficial.

Relationship

Goodman (1992) writes that to provide children with a foundation for community values it takes, "teachers and administrators who, through the dynamics of power between themselves and their students, 1) cultivate children's self-esteem, 2) help children realize that they are not alone in this world, and 3) teach children that caring for others is as important as caring about oneself" (p. 117). Through the development of relationship, Sarah addressed on a daily basis the first two elements that Goodman mentions. Children in her classroom learned quickly that Sarah was "for them," that she eagerly awaited their voices and hugs in the morning, and that she believed they were *"kind and caring"* kids, *"smart kids,"* and *"great kids."* She told them so regularly. Sarah's efforts also provided a focus on Goodman's third element. Sarah emphasized to her kids the importance of "treating others as you want to be treated," and often asked them whether or not particular actions followed this golden rule. Her own actions amongst her kids also served as a living model of caring. Nodding (1992) asserts that, "we do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them" (p. 22). Sarah's relationship with each of her students revealed not only an abiding faith in his or her ability and potential, but also a commitment to care about them personally.

Several educators have discussed the essential nature of relationship, noting that it

can provide students with a sense that they are understood, accepted and respected. Teacher Charlene Jordan explained to author Mike Rose (1995), "Kids say that they want - and they're very clear about this - they want teachers who take an interest in them and get to know them, and who don't judge them too harshly before they find out what they can really do" (pp. 201-202). Some connect the establishment of relationship with feelings such as stability and security within a classroom setting. Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner and Peterson (1994) write, "The ways we organize classroom life should seek to make children feel significant and cared about - by the teacher and by each other. Unless students feel emotionally and physically safe, they won't share real thoughts and feelings" (p. 4). Ayers (1993) asserts, "My ability to exercise my mind with hope and courage is linked to my emotional state . . . 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. 31 & 63).

A report by Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) on the "Cooperative Development Program" reveals that, "Students work harder, achieve more and attribute more importance to schoolwork in classes in which they feel liked, accepted and respected by the teacher and fellow students" (p. 20). The sense of safety and trust that can result from stable, supportive relationship becomes a springboard for risk-taking and engagement in a participatory classroom environment. In Sarah's classroom, many students showed evidence of this pattern. For instance, as Erin was consistently encouraged and referred to by Sarah as a *"blooming reader,"* she began to eagerly look at new books and volunteer to read to preschool students. Her mother reported this as a significant change from the previous year, during which Erin had experienced a great deal of academic failure.

Some writers have noted that when teachers actively develop relationship with their students, their actions provide a positive model for students to consider. Wink (1997) simply states, "Why should kids care if we don't? Caring counts" (p. 148). She goes on to suggest that there is a need for teachers and students to consider the fundamental need for relationship and caring within classrooms, exclaiming, "It's true, love trumps methods!" Noddings (1992), who has developed a vision of schooling as founded upon an ethic of caring, states that, "One of the greatest tasks of teachers is to

help students learn how to be recipients of care. Those who have not learned this by the time they have entered school are at great risk, and their risk is not just academic. Unless they can respond to caring attempts, they will not grow, and they will certainly not learn to care for others" (p. 108).

Given the low self-esteem suggested in the statements and actions of several of Sarah's students, particularly at the beginning of the school year, she wondered whether or not they were accustomed to seeing themselves as recipients of trust or care in a school situation. At that point she could only guess that some were not. I learned a great deal by observing Sarah's work to establish trusting, caring relationships with these children. Her efforts to build these relationships were characterized by a variety of actions and attitudes which are worthy of closer examination.

<u>Seeking to Understand</u>. Cynthia Ellwood (1995) writes, "If I even hope to convince (my students) to take school and my class seriously, I have to understand something about the nature of their experience in the world" (p. 249). Across the course of the school year, Sarah actively sought to learn about her students. Before and after school each day, as well as during lunch time and at various breaks in the daily routine, Sarah talked to her students about their lives. Freire (1973) notes the concept of "sincere dialogue," defined by McCaleb (1994) as "about situations that are concrete to the lives of the participants" (p. 12). Sarah's dialogue with her students engaged them to talk about concrete daily experiences. She asked how Jonathan's basketball game went, how Erin enjoyed her trip to the beach, and who came to Regina's mother's wedding. Sarah also extended an open dialogue invitation to students, welcoming their ideas and comments about what concerned them, through the establishment of "P.N." - "Personal News" time. Through P.N., she learned about Meredith's First Communion, about upcoming visits with Alton's dad and Vincent's brother, and about Evan's action-packed snowball fight with some friends. This proceeding opened up the possibility of mutual dialogue, allowing students, as well as Sarah, to bring up topics of their own choosing.

Through both informal conversation and personal news sharing, Sarah became increasingly informed about her students, leading her toward what Maxine Greene (1988)

defines as "connected teaching" - associated with the principle of care mentioned by Noddings (1984, 1992). Greene goes on to say that, "The caring teacher tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world" (p. 120). By seeking to understand better her students' ways of seeing the world, Sarah learned not only about experiences and interests, but she also began to understand how she might relate to each one - and how she might offer learning opportunities that "made sense" to them. Carini's (1982) consideration of how various children respond uniquely to specific strands of thought and ways of seeing the world relates well to Sarah's growing understanding of her students:

> "It is as if certain ideas, things and qualities called to each of the children in a voice that that child could hear, or as if those ideas, things and qualities beckoned and led each child along particular paths. The voices each hears and the paths each follow are true guides to the education of the person . . . to hear the voices the child hears and to follow the pathways alongside the child opens for the teacher and parent a natural and continuing access to the experiences that will nourish and further the child's growth" (p. 74).

Finding Ways to Enjoy. As Sarah learned more about the "voices" that each of her children heard, their interests, experiences and ways of seeing, and what made each one "tick," she channeled her awareness toward deeper development within their relationship. Lieberman, Falk and Alexander (1995) describe the perspective of a principal whom they have observed working with his teaching staff. They write that this individual told them, "I try to get to know each person by him/herself, as an individual. Then I find something I can relate to and support" (p. 121). Sarah portrayed a similar line of action with her students. She used dialogue to help her connect further and maintain her relationship with each child. Embedded within her efforts to this effect was the idea of enjoyment. Sarah sought to find out what each child enjoyed doing, what they did well, what they most keenly liked to think and talk about. Often, this theme then became a source of enjoyment between both teacher and student.

Working with Evan at the beginning of the school year, I suspect that it was a formidable task for Sarah to establish a mutual line of enjoyment between them. Evan challenged with statements such as, "I hate library. I hate art. I hate everything!" But

shortly into the school year, the daily message board, on which notices and announcements could be posted, provided a hint toward a strong interest that Evan held. On Monday mornings, Sarah would frequently post "news items" concerning professional football teams that had won their games over the course of Sunday play. Because Evan's favorite team was the Dallas Cowboys and Sarah's was their conference rival, the Washington Redskins, Monday message postings soon became a time for good-natured teasing. Often I would arrive to see posted messages such as "Dallas wun!" or "Redskins beat the Eagles." Over time I observed Sarah conversing with Evan often about football, referring to his favorite team as the "D" word, for Dallas, which usually provoked a good deal of laughter and commentary about how sorry he believed her team, the Redskins, to be.

As the year progressed, Sarah utilized the football theme to encourage Evan's interest in learning pursuits as well. As an inquiry project, he researched a number of books about football, as well as Sports Illustrated magazines, to produce his own book about football facts. When Sarah's husband, David, explained the legal process and the role of a lawyer to the class, he did so by sharing an illustration that involved what might happen if Sarah tried to sue Evan for saying the "D" word too many times in class. By the end of the school year, even though football season had long since passed, Evan and Sarah continued to enjoy bantering about their teams. On the last day of school, at which time Sarah presented each child with a book she had chosen and purchased specifically for them, she gave Evan a book titled, "The Team that Won," which told the story of a Dallas Cowboys' superbowl victory. For Evan and Sarah, finding the football theme significantly impacted both their relationship and his interest in learning.

Katie Poduska (1996), who works with students with disabilities, writes, "I deliberately manufacture situtations in which (my) students excel so that a new awareness of each individual's capabilities begins." She adds, "It is my greatest satisfaction and my greatest challenge to strip away such labeling (disabled, etc.) and discover the true voice of the child" (pp. 113-114). When Evan entered second grade, his "label" was that of "behavior problem." In Sarah's classroom, Evan's difficulties with behavior did not quickly diminish, although he made a good deal of progress over the course of time.

Within the classroom setting, however, Sarah consistently focused on more positive ways of identifying Evan. He became not only a Dallas expert, but also a book author and a "smart kid."

Sarah actively sought routes through which she could connect with all of her students and encourage them to see themselves as smart kids, much as she did with Evan. Her efforts remind me of a statement made by educator Linda Rief (1992), "When I stop liking these kids as people, I will get out of the classroom. Listening to them, accepting them for who they are as they go through the worst of times and best of times, laughing with them, respecting them and helping them find what's good in their lives is what I'm about" (p. 91).

Building Trust Through Consistency. Over the course of time, I observed that Sarah's students seemed increasingly more confident, willing to participate, and generally more happy when they arrived at school most mornings. Alton's hug at the end of April was distinctly different from the angry, distancing expression that he generally displayed each morning during the fall months. In June, the comment that Sereita's mom wrote to Sarah on her looping response form was reflective of her daughter's increased self-confidence and general excitement about school. I attributed much of this growth to the consistency and stability that characterized the relationship Sarah was developing with them. It was evident that Sarah's hope in and commitment toward her kids was not unpredictable or conditional. She consistently made conscious efforts to provide them with warm, supportive, stable relationship. Even when students doubted themselves, Sarah remained a constant encourager. When Erin struggled while reading her journal out loud in front of her classmates, Sarah not only helped her with difficult words but also praised her for the creative drawing she had included in the entry. When Evan came back from a trip to the office one afternoon, remarking that he had gotten in trouble for something that another child had done, Sarah assured him, *"I believe you."*

Sarah hoped to foster within her kids a perception of their classroom community as a "safe" one, a place in which taking the risk of making a contribution would be met with support. Noddings (1992) writes that, "All children need to feel safe in their

relations with teachers. It must be acceptable to admit error, confusion, or even distaste for the subject at hand" (p. 108). Within the bounds of a solid, supportive relationship, Sarah believed that her kids could learn to trust. In one of our conversations, Sarah told me, *"We have to trust them and they have to trust us, both ways."* By consistently putting her trust in them, Sarah laid the foundation upon which her students could learn to trust her.

I was surprised by the extent to which Sarah believed in her students through thick and thin. When Evan and Alton acted violently during the fall months, Sarah did enforce their consequential suspensions from school. Yet, upon their returns, she made deliberate efforts to let the boys know that she liked them and that her belief in them was not conditional. When Alton returned after hitting and kicking Sarah she gave him a hug and said, *'I'm glad you're back.'* Sarah explained to me later that despite Alton's outbursts, she continued to try to show him that she liked him. Of her persistence toward this purpose, she said, *"It was real hard to get rid of me."* In February, when her class as a whole acted badly for the substitute teacher, Sarah returned the next day and offered the students a clean slate. Sarah addressed problems and enforced consequences regularly. Yet she made it clear to her students that she did not hold grudges or decrease "caring" for these students as retribution. Even on days when students seemed to have the most difficulty managing their actions, Sarah provided hugs, offered a lap to sit on during school assemblies, left personal notes on the message board, teased and joked or complimented them on something positive she had noticed. In the fall when Donald was often teased, Sarah decided to increase her efforts to show him love. She mentioned to me that she worried about him particularly because none of the other children seemed to *"like him."* Her approach to relationship was relentless. One afternoon, Kelly mentioned to me, "Her energy level, her positive attitude, the way she sticks to it no matter what . . . she just keeps giving and giving. I don't know how she does it!"

Given Sarah's commitment to her students, it is not tremendously surprising that she chose to "loop" with them into the third grade. Grant, Johnson and Richardson (1996), who wrote <u>The Looping Handbook</u>, note that relationship is at the core of this practice. They assert that, "The most important variable in a positive elementary school

program is the constant attention of a single teacher/caregiver with whom the children can develop a predictable and meaningful relationship. (The multiyear classroom) is a stable force in children's lives" (p. 15). Deborah Jacoby (1996), an experienced multiyear classroom teacher, speaks on the positive impact of looping upon her relationships with students, "The students' relationships with me and with each other deepened over time. We knew each others' strengths and weaknesses. And as a family, we shared triumphs and tears. The sense of the classroom being an interdependent community of learners was so very strong" (p. 20). Noddings (1992) also mentions the benefits of looping in relation to her ethic of caring as an educational foundation. She states, "Children need continuity of people. Students could easily stay with one teacher for three or more years rather than the typical one year . . . students need to know someone cares for them as persons" (p. 68). Sarah made it clear, in statements to me and to several of her colleagues, that she *wanted* to loop with this group of children. She wanted to deepen their relationship over time.

Respecting Students and Valuing their Contributions. Central to the way that Sarah developed and maintained relationship with her students is the issue of respect. Sarah's perspective of her students was based upon respect and dignity, not sympathy or pity. McLaren's (1989) account of his early work in an inner-city classroom reveals an ethic of "sympathy" that he believed he ascribed to: "Throughout my days in the classroom, I had unknowingly ascribed to the pedagogical mainstay of many liberal teachers - I felt sympathy and compassion for my students while employing a pedagogy geared to 'compensate' for the deficiencies of society's young victims" (p. 232). McLaren goes on to say that only over time did he become aware of the problematic nature of such a teaching position, which ultimately disrespected their value as learners and as classroom contributors. As a beginning teacher, I also leaned toward a position of sympathy, trying to "help" students such as Maria Charro. Ultimately this may have provided my students with the sense that someone cared; it certainly did not, however, foster a sense of empowerment within them. Sarah's position amongst her students differed distinctly from that which I practiced or McLaren described. Although certainly compassionate, Sarah's engagement with students was based upon respect rather than pity. Sarah

demonstrated respect for her students by inviting and valuing their contributions.

Joan Wink (1997) addresses what it means to invite and value students' contributions within a classroom by considering the concept of "voice." She charges educators to consider: "Who uses their voice to express their perspective? Whose voice is promoted and valued? Whose voice is discredited with a wave of the hand?" (p. 58) Wink adds that it takes courage for someone to express their voice. "Voice," as referred to by some educators, means much more than just oral language. Oldfather (1992) writes, "Voice comes from a deeper place than our throats. Voice comes from our hearts, from our minds, and from inner places of knowing and feeling" (p. 9). In expressing "voice," students made audible to Sarah and their classmates representations of who they were. The sense of trust established within Sarah's classroom through relationship actively supported the development of courage required for this type of self disclosure.

Sarah's responses to her students' efforts were also supportive, particularly because of the dignity and respect that were granted to student expressions. When Sarah's children wrote letters to her, she made a point to reciprocate, telling me, *"My policy is - you write me, I'll write you back!"* She explained that she wanted students to realize that she valued their communications. When students announced their ideas publicly - whether orally or in writing, Sarah expressed her support publicly as well. Once when Sarah turned on the overhead projector to write out the morning message, she noticed that a child had written, "I love you" across the transparency film. Rather than erasing the words to create a clean writing space, she announced to the class that she liked the message so much she wanted to keep it there. Her written message wrapped around the child's words. When students approached Sarah privately concerning their feelings or thoughts, she respected their need for confidentiality. Regina was noticeably upset during the weeks before her mother's wedding and mentioned to Sarah that things weren't going well for her at home. Sarah asked, *"Would you like to plan a time when we can talk privately?"* Regina agreed to Sarah's suggestion, and the two decided to have lunch together in the classroom.

In addition to expressions that were made sporadically across the course of any

given day, Sarah deliberately invited students to share their ideas and opinions during instructional time in the classroom. On many occasions she pointed out to the students that they were *"teaching"* each other. As I'll discuss further concerning shared opportunities for authority, it was critical to Sarah that students realized that they shared the "ownership of knowing" within the room. Students shared ideas and opinions through activities such as creating collaborative class summaries of material they discussed, doing personal research and sharing what they learned with the group, and "teaching" their classmates. These opportunities, among others, enabled Sarah's kids to publicly express what they knew.

Throughout these opportunities for sharing ideas and opinions, Sarah modeled and nurtured a concept referred to by Oldfather and Dahl (1994) as "honored voice." They write that, "the condition of 'honored voice' is evident in teachers' careful attention to students' questions, and in responses students make to each other as they consider their classmates' ideas" (p. 145). Sarah's efforts to establish a sense of honored voice within the classroom were extremely consistent. It was common to hear her say, *"All eyes on (the speaker)."* I learned that Sarah included as speakers not only herself, but also children who assumed various teaching roles. A representative example occurred when one of the children, Regina, was teaching a Math process to a group of her peers during the spring months. After Regina had begun her explanation, several students became inattentive. Sarah asked Regina to stop and addressed the group, *"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."* As the year progressed, I observed that several of Sarah's students had picked up on her practice of attending to the speaker, whether teacher or student, and were emulating her process. Christy commented, "I'm still waiting for lots of eyes," before beginning to read a piece of writing to the class. Vincent stood silently before sharing his football book, looking around the classroom at his peers in anticipation of their attention. On several occasions during the spring months I noticed that students initiated applause for peers at the close of individual and group presentations. And during the "question and comment" time that typically followed the discussion of a project, students often complimented their classmates regarding specific

aspects of the work shared. Following Sarah's lead, they began to demonstrate appreciation for each others' contributions.

Encouraging Collaboration with Parents. During a conversation shortly before school began, Sarah expressed to me that she planned to frequently invite parents to talk with her about their children. She explained, *"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 I need to know about your child that will help me be a better teacher."* As Sarah continued to talk to me about her work with parents throughout the school year, she spoke of them as sources of knowledge about their children; she also expressed her desire to keep lines of communication with each parent continually open, and she told me that she believed their support and collaboration were critical to her efforts with their children. When situations arose which involved discipline of a student, Sarah was on the phone that day after school or that evening to talk with the parent about what had happened. Additionally, often when students experienced a sense of accomplishment or made steps toward growth, Sarah was again on the phone promptly, relating to the parent what had occurred.

Sarah's relationship with Evan's mother stands out as an example of this type of ongoing communication. Shortly into the year, at a time during which Evan was having difficulty controlling his temper, Sarah phoned Mrs. Roberts and said, *"I'm calling to ask for your help."* Sarah explained to me that Evan's mother was quite concerned about her son's school behavior and his learning. She willingly agreed to work together with Sarah in an effort to support him. Following their conversation, Sarah communicated Evan's progress to his mother by writing weekly postcards to her. Mrs. Roberts later set an appointment with Sarah on parent teacher conference day and told her that this was the first conference she had ever attended. As the year progressed, Sarah phoned Evan's mother on various occasions, both to praise him for successes and to ask for additional help when problems arose.

Interestingly, even though Evan's mother told Sarah during the spring that she wanted to move her son to a school with a Black principal, she ultimately decided to

allow Evan to stay with Sarah, at Eastside, for third grade. Sarah told me later that she and Mrs. Roberts had openly discussed issues of race, particularly in relation to what would be in Evan's best interests. Sarah agreed with Delpit's (1994) assertion that, "To say you don't see color is to say you don't see children" (p. 132). In addition, Sarah's actions with Evan's mother reflect her close alignment with another of Delpit's (1995) recommendations, that "appropriate education for children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture" (p. 45). Sarah explained to me that one thing that helped her to develop a positive relationship with Evan was the fact that she and his mother could talk frankly.

To me, Sarah's actions signaled respect for parents. She seemed to view them as collaborators and partners, involved mutually with her toward the common purpose of seeing their children grow as learners and classroom community members. As a parent myself, I was impressed by both her respectful attitude and consistent efforts toward this purpose.

McCaleb (1994), describing collaborative work amongst teachers, students, families and community, asserts that, "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" (p. 39). She supports her assertion with findings from a study presented by the Institute for Education in Transformation (1992) which revealed that "parents say they want an honest dialogue between themselves and their children's teachers" (p. 12). Sarah's willingness to be honest and vulnerable was apparent. To Evan's and Anthony's mothers, she began simply with, *"I'm calling to ask for your help,"* when phoning them. When Jonathan's mother spoke with Sarah about her uncertainty concerning whether or not it would be to his benefit to loop with the class into third grade or to accept admittance into the TAG program, Sarah expressed her understanding of the dilemma she faced. When both Evan's and Anthony's mothers talked to Sarah regarding their concerns about the "white" environment that their sons were placed in, Sarah asked them to help her understand their position and to provide her with insight concerning how to best meet the needs of their sons as a white teacher.

I got the sense that the relationship Sarah desired to build with each of her students' parents was a reciprocal one. She hoped to share her concerns, questions and ideas with them. Likewise, she hoped that they might share their concerns, questions and ideas with her. In both respects, she sought for honesty rather than pretentiousness. As Levine, Lowe, Peterson and Tenorio (1995) suggest, Sarah seemed to believe that, "no one has a stronger, more direct interest in good education than a parent. Educators who fail to recognize this . . . can never fully succeed in educating young people" (p. 239).

Expectations

Sarah's respect for her students' potential and their parents' hopes was exemplified through the high expectations that she maintained within the classroom. These expectations were an integral part of the ongoing relationships she sought to develop with her kids. First and Gray (1991) explain their conception of teacher expectations by outlining a process that occurs between teacher and student. They describe teacher expectations as a starting point and add that teachers' actions towards students are based upon these expectations. Subsequently, these actions convey to students what their teachers expect of their effort and behavior. Ultimately, First and Gray assert, "high expectations lead to the achievement of one's potential, and low expectations lead to the lack of achievement of potential." They go on to explain that although expectation "treatment" may seem subtle, "children both observe and internalize the messages that teachers given them about their potential" (p. 250). I observed that Sarah consistently conveyed to her students, both through action and word, that she expected them to act as responsible, capable learners as well as respectful, cooperative members of the class group.

Maintaining Learning Expectations. In the area of learning, Sarah's expectations were made apparent through the work that she asked of her students. She actively engaged her students in learning processes continually. During Independent Reading time, they read. During Writing Workshop, they wrote regularly, edited the work of others, typed reports on nearby computers, and prepared their work for presentation.

During Math and Science, they participated in hands-on experiences that required observation, reflection and analysis of processes. During Inquiry, they created their own questions and learned to research texts and alternative sources to find answers. During Center time, they explored areas of interest such as calligraphy, soap carving, fingerprinting or paper folding. Across the course of the day there were opportunities to work with classmates in collaborative groups, to write in journals, to send "mail" to other children in the building, to read to preschoolers, to carry out classroom responsibilities and to listen to Sarah read - every day. A friend and colleague of Sarah's told me, Anne Martin, told me: "If I could say anything about Sarah, it would be that she is the most incredible motivator I've ever seen. And it's not only what she does, but it's what they (the children) do . . . there's not one minute of that class that's wasted." Sarah engaged her students in learning continually; the activities she introduced required their ongoing active participation; there was little or no opportunity to sit idly in her room.

The consistency of high interest, participatory activities within Sarah's classroom was a positive refutation to a practice that Ira Shor (1992) refers to as "downward tracking," a pattern that involves placing non-elite students, such as Sarah's, into generally dull, punitive classes, in favor of providing the students considered most elite or "brightest" with the most qualified teachers and richest opportunities for learning. Sarah, who spent many years teaching those children considered the "brightest," refused to lower her expectations for this group of children. The beliefs she expressed to me align closely with a statement made by First and Gray (1991), "We need to teach ALL students as we would the 'gifted and talented.' We don't believe in ability grouping and refuse to give some cream and some water" (p. 92).

Sarah's students, many of whom were from minority groups, and all of whom were from low socioeconomic groups, were not "excused" from responsibilities in challenging learning situations because of their backgrounds or experiences. Educator L. C. Clark (1994) expresses a challenge to educators to maintain high expectations of students regardless of "status," noting that the outcome of lowered expectations actually promotes a subtle form of social reproduction (p. 127), perpetuating the dominance of groups of power over others. Delpit (1995) supports the need for high expectations as

well, alluding in particular to the need for African American students to be required to achieve academic excellence that will prepare them to fully participate in the "culture of power" that exists within the mainstream of American life. Sarah's academic expectations of all students, consistently high, were supportive of the need to provide engaging opportunities for, support for and expectance of their knowledge acquisition and thoughtful application of learning in all subject areas.

Maintaining Behavior Expectations. In addition to academic expectations, Sarah consistently expressed to her students, through word and deed, the need to act as respectful, cooperative members of the classroom community. Sarah's own actions toward students modeled what this type of activity "looked like." Her practices of looking for the best in students, developing relationship, establishing trustworthiness and showing respectful valuations of the contributions of class members were visible on a daily basis. Sarah demonstrated for students what she expected of them. Through this consistent modeling, Sarah established herself as what Coles (1997) refers to as a "moral authority" (p. 44) within the classroom context. The way she lived out her personal beliefs proved her to be a visibly recognizable moral authority who "made room in her mind for others" (p. 185) through genuine and trustworthy interest, warmth and respect. Coles adds that in characterizing a person of moral authority, it is necessary to emphasize that the point is not to "consider a specific act, or a series of acts, a routine, a set of rules, a strategy, but rather, a way of being to which one first aspires, then works, day by day, to find for oneself and to share with others" (p. 195). Sarah's core belief in her students was worked out daily through her words, her actions, her presence.

In conjunction with the way Sarah lived out her own beliefs amongst her students, she also explicitly conveyed to them the need for their respectful behavior toward her and each other. One bedrock "rule" within the classroom was "Treat others as you want to be treated," and another was, "Respect teachers, students and all staff." The class discussions which Sarah initiated across the course of the school year also reflected her desire for students to act respectfully toward each other, particularly the "Team Cooperation" discussion in November and the "Kind, Caring Classroom" discussion in February. Sarah made it clear to her students that they were responsible for their own

choices as class members; she emphasized their role as moral agents. Through explicit guidelines, class discussions and informal daily interactions, Sarah focused upon the need for each class member, including herself, to act with cooperation, kindness and respect. Beyer (1996) defines cooperation as, "the mode by which respectful, empathic negotiation can take place . . . being quiet, listening and considering each others' ideas . . . encouraging and respecting each other" (pp. 31-32). Sarah modeled, supported and praised cooperative efforts of this nature.

As the year progressed, Sarah expressed to me often her desire that the classroom community might be a place where kids felt safe, not only physically, but also socially and emotionally. Consistent expectations of herself and her students as related to cooperation, kindness and respect served to foster this sense of safety. Rose (1995) writes of several exemplary classrooms he visited, "there was a physical safety . . . there was also safety from insult and diminishment" (p. 413). Likewise, Sarah desired for her students to feel that their contributions and efforts as class members would be valued, rather than demeaned. Toward the end of the year, when John Dixon mentioned to Sarah that her classroom had become a "warm, supportive classroom," I sensed how meaningful this valuation was to her. It was clear that she considered the growth of characteristics such as respect and cooperation amongst class members to be crucial to the establishment of a sense of classroom community.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF COMMUNITY

As a researcher over the course of a school year, I observed that Sarah's hopes for the development of classroom community were not realized quickly, but rather, over a lengthy period of time. In August, she described to me her commitment to nurture community amongst her students. In the Fall, when many of her students had difficulty making positive contributions as class members, and some acted violently towards others, Sarah struggled with what might be the best possible way to continue to foster the growth of community - bearing in mind the need to balance individual rights with a sense of safety and common good for the group as a whole. She did so by inviting student participation and decision making, while at the same time establishing basic guidelines for all class members to abide by. In the Winter, some students frequently acted with kindness toward their classmates, while others showed acts of kindness at times, but not regularly. During these months, Sarah introduced to the class the concept of a *"kind, caring classroom."* In the Spring, as students' positive collaborations grew more consistent, Sarah continued to talk with them about the concept of treating others well. Frequently she asked her students to consider whether or not their words and actions aligned with the *"kind and caring"* focus that had been established. As the school year ended, Sarah continued to emphasize opportunities through which students might experience firsthand what it meant to show respect, kindness and care toward others. She encouraged her kids to help one another in learning situations, to team up to assume responsibilities such as classroom clean-up and to serve as reading buddies to preschool children.

Although the progression towards community in Sarah's classroom might appear through this introduction to be relatively clear cut, it was not. The evolution of Sarah's students as a positive classroom community was laden with struggle, risk and unpredictable development. Sarah's dogged determination to keep moving towards the ideal of community, refusal to see her students as inherently "bad," and willingness to continually experiment, assess and revise her efforts were significant factors that fueled

the growth that the group experienced. Throughout the year, it was evident that one of Sarah's central purposes as a classroom teacher was the development of what Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner and Peterson (1994) refer to as a "community of conscience" (p. 5). In this respect, she expressed her hope that each student might grow as a moral agent who consciously considered others as they spoke and acted within the shared classroom space.

Purpose: Moral Intelligence

Robert Coles (1997) describes conscience as, "the voice within us that has really heard the voices of others . . . and so whispers and sometimes shouts oughts and naughts to us, guides us in our thinking and our doing. The conscience constantly presses its moral weight on our feeling lives, our imaginative lives" (p. 105). Coles adds that children of elementary school age are at a particular time in their lives when the development of conscience is of distinct importance. He quotes Anna Freud who observed that, "This is the age that a child's conscience is built - or isn't; it is the time when a child's character is built and consolidated - or isn't" (p. 98).

Sarah's lived actions and stated expectations, along with classroom structures that she put into place, conveyed a specific "way of being" that characterized the sense of conscience she was promoting amongst her students. This way of being is related to the development of what Coles refers to as "moral intelligence." His definition of moral intelligence is stated in terms of the actions of persons who exemplify it: "Boys and girls who have (moral intelligence) are 'good,' kind, they think about others and extend themselves towards those others - they are 'smart' that way . . . they have an evident desire to be tactful, courteous, generous in their willingness to see the world as others see it, to experience the world through someone else's eyes - and to act on that knowledge with kindness" (p. 4).

Others have also described "ways of being" which are similar to this description of moral intelligence. Alfie Kohn (1993) explains the notion of "prosocial orientation," when he writes, "We want children to develop what Ervin Staub has called a 'prosocial orientation' - a generalized inclination to care, share, and help across different situations

and with different people, including those they don't know, don't like, and don't look like" (p. 244). Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997) consider a similar idea in the concept of "Gemeinschaftsgefuhl," introduced by Alfred Adler. They state, "'Social interest' is more than a skill. It is 'Gemeinschaftsgefuhl.' Gemeinschaftsgefuhl is a German word that was coined by Alfred Adler. It is difficult to translate into English because it means so much: an attitude of caring and concern for others, for the community, and for the environment - and the action required to demonstrate this concern. The closest Adler could come to an English translation is 'social interest'" (pp. 38-39).

Common to the three conceptions, moral intelligence, prosocial orientation and Gemeinschaftsgefuhl, is the idea of consideration of and concerned action towards others. Integral within this way of being are components of both attitude and action. Being morally intelligent and prosocially oriented, a person both "cherishes that which is right and is prompted to act" accordingly (Beyer, 1996, p. 32). This orientation is the stuff of which conscience and character are made, an active rather than passive way of seeing the world. Coles (1997) defines character as "who we are expressed in action" (p. 7) and goes on to describe "good" children, for whom moral intelligence has become foundational to their character:

> "Good children are boys and girls who . . . have learned to take seriously the very notion, the desirability of goodness - a living up to the Golden Rule, a respect for others, a commitment of mind, heart and soul to one's family, neighborhood, nation - and have also learned that the issue of goodness is not an abstract one, but rather a concrete, expressive one: how to turn the rhetoric of goodness into action, moments that affirm the presence of goodness in a particular lived life" (p. 17).

Sarah consistently expressed her desire that each child would grow over the course of time toward a way of being within the classroom that aligns closely with Coles' description of moral intelligence. In addition, she envisioned this growth as impacting not only individual development, but also the progression of the classroom community as a whole. I believe that her perception paralleled a definition of "caring community" outlined in Alfie Kohn's (1993) text, stated as:

> "A community where care and trust are emphasized above restrictions and threats, where unity and pride (of accomplishment and in purpose) replace winning and losing, and where each person is asked, helped and inspired

> to live up to such ideals and values as kindness, fairness and responsibility. (Such) a classroom community seeks to meet each student's need to feel competent, connected to others and autonomous . . . Students are not only exposed to basic human values, they also have many opportunities to think about, discuss and act on those values, while gaining experiences that promote empathy and understanding of others" (p. 246).

As focused upon in chapter four, Sarah was well aware that the development of a community of care and trust began with her own attitudes and actions. Sarah's abiding belief in her children as "good," the positive expectations she held, and the trusting relationships she established with them all served as components of her moral authority within the classroom. When she told her kids that they were wonderful, asked them about their basketball games and ballet recitals, and publicly admired their drawings and writings, Sarah portrayed what Coles (1997) refers to as "what really matters - constant evidence of consideration to others" (p. 185). Coles' premise throughout his writing is that children are ever-attentive witnesses to the behavior of adults around them, learning daily as they observe grown-up morality, or the lack thereof, in action. He explains, "The child looks for cues as to how one ought to behave and finds them as we go about our lives, making choices, addressing people, showing in action our rock-bottom assumptions, desires and values, and thereby telling those young observers much more than we may realize" (p. 5). In addition to the behaviors that Sarah modeled, her individual words or actions of encouragement towards each individual child played a part in the foundation she provided for them. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott quote Rudolf Dreikurs (1966) who stated, "We constantly encourage or discourage those around us and, thereby, contribute materially to their greater or lesser ability to function well" (p. 212). Sarah lived out moral intelligence, expected it of her students, and supported them as they grew in this realm.

Struggle and Structure

Although Sarah consistently modeled respectful attitudes and actions towards her students, the Fall months in her classroom were extremely difficult for the class group. In alignment with her beliefs that children should be self-directed and intrinsically motivated as citizens within the classroom community, Sarah purposefully stayed away

from a teacher-directed, rule based system for classroom management when the year began. She explained that such a system would send a message to her students that she held negative expectations of their behavior, a message that she was determined to fight. In an August interview, Sarah had mentioned 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 explained to me, *"This is already, 'here's how you're going to get into trouble!'"* Instead, Sarah wanted to solicit input from the students towards the purpose of collectively establishing classroom behavior policies. She also planned to work through problems as a group when the need arose.

Hopeful Invitations: Alarming Responses. But the feeling within Sarah's classroom was not one of positive collaboration or constructive decision making during the first couple of months of the school year. Instead, many of Sarah's students acted in ways that deterred from a positive learning environment, and several acted so as to threaten the security of others, both emotionally and physically, within the classroom. Sarah described to me her thoughts during this time period: *"I had never, in my career, had trouble controlling children. I mean, I'd always had some that were challenges, but had never struggled like I had with this group of personalities. 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 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 in the beginning."*

Sarah's experience at this point in the school year reflects a dilemma that has been described in several accounts written by other educators whose purposes were to establish and nurture classroom communities in which students' needs and contributions were central focuses. Linda Christensen (1994a), a high school teacher, writes that, "For too many days during the first quarter, I felt like a prison guard . . . My impulse was to have everyone sit down, be polite and listen to each other . . . A great goal - but it doesn't happen easily!" (p. 50). And in Democratic Schools, Bob Peterson (1995) states that,

> "The first year of the Fratney program verged on disaster because we overestimated the responsibilities our students would be able to handle. Specifically we failed to anticipate that a large percentage of the children

> who chose to come to our school were having little success at their previous school. Many students lacked basic self-management skills. They were unable to handle rights as simple as being able to take a pass and go to the bathroom on their own. We realized that we had to consciously help students make the transition from the past . . . to the future, where we wanted them to act like responsible human beings" (p. 70).

Jesse Goodman (1992), who spent a year as participant observer in "Harmony School" (a pseudonym), mentions also that, "Like most children in our society, Harmony's students did not come to school with a particular interest in democracy or community values" (p. 103). Goodman adds that the issue of behavior within a classroom is a significant dilemma facing educators who are committed to democratic ways of constructing classroom communities. He writes, "One does not have to be a sociologist to see that children in our society have difficulty putting the common good in front of their own immediate desires. Yet children's true individuality (rather than their self-indulgence) can grow only within a community structure in which there are restrictions and expectations placed upon the individual by the community" (p. 103).

In Sarah's classroom, it was evident that most of her students had some level of difficulty putting the interests of others in front of their own desires. Although Sarah wanted her kids to embrace their sense of freedom as self-directed members for positive purposes, she soon realized that their understandings of consciously using their freedom for the good of the larger group was limited. Even students who generally treated others with kindness tended to seek their own interests at times. For instance, when Meredith sorted out treats amongst herself and others who were attending a picnic with her, she allotted herself the most candy. When Jonathan was asked to help Regina with class work, he protested, not wanting to work with her. And when Erin was placed in a position where she had to choose between supporting two friends or making fun of them along with a larger group, she opted to join the group. These actions, however, were not typical of their general behavior. Coles (1997) describes these types of incidents as "occasional lapses into isolating self-preoccupation wherein we lose sight of our obligations to others" (p. 22).

For other children in Sarah's classroom, however, even the most basic self-

management skills were a significant concern. Within the first two months of the school year, Alton had physically hit several children, as well as Sarah. Even during the winter months, he told me, "I want to hit Donald 25,000 times." Across the school year, his comments and actions were both intense and unpredictable. Sarah was greatly concerned about both Alton's actions and his beliefs about living amongst others. Her statements remind me of an account shared by teacher Erin Roche (1996), who shared the story of a sixth grader named Juan. On one occasion, Juan physically attacked a class member and later stated, "I'll kill him. I don't care what they do. I don't care if I'm suspended. I'll kill him." Roche writes, "Of course, I don't think Juan really would kill Darnell, but I do worry that his moral curriculum had taught him to believe that killing Darnell would be permissible" (p. 33).

As Erin Roche sensed concerning Juan, Sarah perceived that Alton's sense of morality was not firmly grounded in looking out for the interests of others. Instead, his words and behaviors were frequently aligned with what Coles (1997) describes as, "a child who seems to have little or no understanding of (the Golden) Rule, a child who has, by deed, adopted another kind of rule, a penny-ante rule whose essence is, 'Think of yourself all the time and let others worry about themselves'" (p. 25). Sarah came to believe that Alton could not keep an eye out for others because he was wrapped up within his own needs. Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997) refer to such a perception of one's world as "survival behavior." They describe, "When children believe they do not belong and are not significant, they adopt survival (defensive) behavior. Survival behavior is often called misbehavior. Survival behavior is based on mistaken goals of how to find belonging and significance and may take the form of trying to get undue attention, negative power, or revenge, or by giving up" (p. 72). Given Alton's life experiences, as a child who was told he was responsible for the death of a sibling, as a child who was left without care on multiple occasions, as a child who was considered "trouble" by former teachers and classmates when the school year began, Sarah thought it was likely that his sense of belonging and significance was seriously compromised.

Alfie Kohn (1993) asserts,

> "Children are more likely to grow into caring people if they know they themselves are cared about. A warm, nurturing environment is the sine

> qua non of positive development . . . If children feel safe, they can take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, learn to trust, share their feelings, and grow. If they are taken seriously, they can respect others. If their emotional needs are met, they have the luxury of being able to meet other people's needs. Deprived of these things, however, they may spend their lives doing psychological damage control. Their own needs may echo so loudly in their ears that they will be unable to hear, much less respond to, the cries of others" (pp. 238-240).

Sarah's work with Alton across the course of the year was steeped in her efforts to build an unconditional relationship with him and to provide opportunities for him to succeed and contribute positively. Carter Bayton, a teacher in an inner-city New York school, expressed to Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997), "You have to reach the heart before you can reach the mind" (p. 19). Sarah tried to do just this. She sought to offer him the "warm, nurturing environment" that Kohn mentioned by providing him daily with a fresh chance for relationship, regardless of any outbursts the day before. Over time, she believed that Alton's capacity for trust grew significantly. His volatile episodes noticeably lessened. Yet throughout this time, while maintaining her commitment to Alton's well being, Sarah was also concerned about the impact of Alton's outbursts upon the others members of the classroom. After several months, small signs of Alton's progress were noticeable. By December, he had begun to take his coat off and participate in class during the morning hours, by February he agreed to "teach" his peers a paper folding activity, and one day late in April, he greeted me with an enthusiastic hug.

In addition to Alton, there were others in Sarah's classroom who had a significant level of difficulty with basic self-management skills. Evan damaged classroom items on several occasions as a result of violent outbursts. He also wrote a disturbing mail message which resulted in Mr. Dixon's policy that all school mail had to be cleared by the classroom teachers. Donald frequently wandered around the room during class time, sometimes leaving the room and walking down the hallways when Sarah was occupied with other students. He also stole items from the desks of his classmates and from Sarah. Anthony and Chip both became easily angered, each making derogatory comments about the other's race at various points. In addition, Chip refused, on several occasions, to participate in class activities, and Anthony sometimes called out loudly during class time

or ran around the room.

For each of these students, it was clear that the behavioral choices they continued to make were not generally acts of kindness towards others, despite Sarah's modeling, her positive expectations, the relationships she sought doggedly to build, and the opportunities she provided for each student to successfully contribute within the classroom context. Ira Shor (1992) writes, "The simple fact is that students are not expecting a democratic classroom . . . It would be naive to think that my sincerity or my good intentions are enough to transform their prior experience. I have to provide a democratic structure and invite them into it step by step" (p. 158). As the fall months progressed, Sarah explored what it meant to invite her students step by step towards making positive, morally intelligent choices as classroom community members.

Purposeful Restructuring. Throughout Sarah's efforts across the fall months, she was continually involved in a reflective process, engaging in what Ayers (1993) has called, "Doing philosophy." He explains, "'Doing philosophy' as a teacher means asking, 'Given what I know about this student, this class, this world, what should I do?'" (p. 22) On several occasions, Sarah reshaped her considerations and approaches within the classroom as she continually learned more about the kids, their needs and the direction that the class as a whole was moving in. The first significant shift in approach that I noted occurred within the first few weeks of the school year. At this point, Sarah provided the class with four basic rules, which she referred to as "expectations." The rules were related to two general areas of expectation: first, that the students were to treat other people with respect and courtesy, and second, that the students must actively participate and assume responsibility within all learning activities. To complement these expectations, Sarah offered the children "listening coupons" when they followed directions, participated in class discussions and treated each other kindly. The acquisition of coupons meant that a child was eligible to have lunch picnics with friends on Sarah's corner rug. In addition, Sarah and Kelly jointly decided to host a "Fun Friday" activity, scheduled for each Friday afternoon. Kids could attend the activity based upon whether or not they adhered to classroom expectations throughout that week.

Sarah mentioned to me during several conversations that she was never

completely comfortable with the "systems" that she had introduced to her students. She worried that these processes were antithetical to the student-centered, democratic classroom approach that she was seeking to work toward. Yet the children's actions during the first few weeks of the school year signaled to Sarah that her early efforts were not enough to provide these children with the supports that they needed to move them towards acting in positive, respectful ways towards others. Sarah admitted to me that she struggled a great deal concerning what she should do to support these children. Her experience was similar to what Joan Wink (1997) describes as confronting "all I haven't experienced. It is what I don't know and understand . . . our answers don't fit" (p. 5).

In addition to her concerns about student's actions and attitudes within the classroom, Sarah was concerned as well about their behaviors with other teachers and in other spaces at Eastside. Across the course of the school year, many incidents occurred which involved students' disrespectful actions or statements towards others. Evan's difficulty in music class, Anthony's outbursts in Kelly's classroom, Alton's physical violence during library time, and Chip's use of "dirty words" during lunch were examples. In addition, there were teachers who stated to Sarah that her children were difficult to teach. Sarah's experience was similar to an elementary teacher, Anne (a pseudonym), that researcher Celia Oyler (1996) writes of. Oyler states, "Anne grew increasingly concerned about students' behavior when she wasn't with them. She heard repeatedly from other teachers in the school and from substitutes that they were hard to control" (pp. 43-44). Oyler adds, "It is clear that classroom changes cannot be addressed in isolation of the wider school . . . community" (p. 45). When Sarah's students were reprimanded by the Music teacher, librarian and guidance counselor, she responded by trying to prevent further negative episodes with these teachers. At times she reviewed class "rules" with her kids before they attended special area classes. On other occasions Sarah attended those classes with her students, observing their behavior and recording what she saw. Upon returning to their classroom, Sarah discussed with her kids both the respectful and disrespectful behaviors that she had observed, complimenting when she could and enforcing consequences, such as loss of clip points, when she sensed a need to do so.

Sarah implemented the four classroom expectations and the complementary

privileges that children could work toward because of the struggles that she and her children experienced as she sought to guide them toward positive, respectful actions and attitudes. Sarah sought John Dixon's counsel in October, explaining to him her ambivalence about these new practices. She asked him, *"I have a management system. I just put one up . . . How do I do it? How do I work that out? . . . I want to be student centered . . . this is wrong, obviously?"* Sarah's concerns have been mirrored in the efforts of others educators as well. Teacher Erin Roche (1996) writes, "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 the students, the community, and me?" (p. 37). And teacher Ushma Shah (1996) states,

> "As an undergraduate, I was extremely critical of teachers' exercising power in the classroom. When I am a teacher, I wrote, these 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 the halls in an appropriate way. 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 is a process" (in pp. 59-60).

John Dixon's response to Sarah echoed Shah's conception of student growth towards responsible classroom citizenship as a process. John told her, "If they haven't had 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." Given John's counsel, Sarah determined to continue with the management plan she and Kelly had introduced to their students, perceiving it not as a permanent means of controlling students, but rather as a support for the kids, who were in the process of developing inner structures for acting within a classroom where many choices and responsibilities existed.

In the sense that Sarah perceived and structured her classroom management systems, it is clear that she was attempting to balance the rights of individuals with the

rights of the community as a whole. Ira Shor (1992) writes, "Structure can be democratic, but not permissive; it relates individual rights to group rights" (p. 160). Ernest Boyer (1995) also addresses this issue, stating of "The Basic School" which he envisions, "All students in the school discover very early that individual rights must be balanced by responsibility to the group. It is simply impossible to sustain community in a chaotic climate, where student conduct is undisciplined and where children fail to live by fairly imposed rules" (p. 24). Goodman (1992) adds to the conversation as well, asserting that, "Reluctance to adequately confront the issue of discipline has greatly reduced the credibility of critical educators and their ideas about educating children in our society" (p. 117).

In Sarah's case, she faced the issue of student attitudes and actions head on, rather than avoiding it. She made purposeful efforts towards building opportunities for individual rights, but provided her students with boundaries within which those rights needed to be exercised, thus supporting individual responsibilities for the well-being of the group as a whole. Even so, she continued to tell me at various points across the year that she hoped her students might come to rely less and less on the external boundaries and privileges that she provided, and move further towards intrinsic purposes for positive, respectful attitudes and actions. The use of extrinsic motivations continued to be, for Sarah, a "contradiction in her educational space," (p. 6) as Joan Wink (1997) describes it.

Some may argue that Sarah's classroom management systems follow an "assertive discipline" model. This model, advocated first in the 1970's by Lee and Marlene Canter (1976), is based upon the premise that, "teachers must utilize a systematic approach to discipline which enables them to set firm consistent limits for the students while at the same time remaining cognizant of the reality of the students' need for warmth and positive support" (back cover). Following an assertive discipline model, teachers are encouraged to initially announce classroom expectations and the consequences for breaking them, and then to firmly, consistently hold to these expectations and consequences with all children. Along with the use of negative consequences for misbehavior, teachers are to provide consistent praise and positive consequences for good behaviors. In the book, Assertive Discipline: A Take-Charge Approach for Today's

Educator, the Canters state that the volume is designed to "provide the teacher with the skills and confidence necessary to help her to (1) identify her wants and needs, (2) identify her personal 'roadblocks to getting her wants and needs met, and (3) to learn how cognitively and behaviorally to overcome these 'roadblocks' in order to maximize her assertive potential" (p. 10). In essence, the assertive discipline model, as envisioned by the Canters, begins with the teachers' wants and needs.

Alfie Kohn (1993), author of Punished By Rewards, argues that the positive and negative consequences associated with an assertive discipline model inevitably work against the development of moral growth within children. Rather, he perceives such consequences as means of controlling children, which ultimately serves the interests of the teacher rather than the long-term needs of the children. Kohn writes that, using an assertive discipline approach, "(Children) are reduced to a repertoire of behaviors . . . and all rewards, by virtue of being rewards, are not attempts to influence or persuade or solve problems together, but simply to control" (pp. 26-27). He adds later in his text, "Do rewards motivate people? Absolutely. They motivate people to get rewards . . . yet several studies and experiments have converged on a single conclusion: extrinsic rewards reduce intrinsic motivation" (pp. 67-71). Throughout his book, Kohn continues to support his belief that rewards and punishments produce temporary compliance rather than internal growth. He further states,

> "We teach thoughtless conformity to school rules and call the conforming child 'responsible.' If this is the sort of responsibility we wish to promote, then a ceaseless application of punishments or rewards would seem the most efficient way - possibly the only way - to go about it. But if by responsibility we mean the capacity to act carefully and thoughtfully, to make ethical judgments and behave in accordance with them, then . . . extrinsic motivators take us in the wrong direction" (p. 160).

At the surface level, Sarah's approach to classroom management resembled an assertive discipline model. She established clear expectations, praised good behavior and provided rewards such as picnic lunches and Fun Friday, and enforced consequences for negative behaviors, which generally involved loss of classroom privileges. Sarah's work with her kids differed from an assertive discipline model, however, at a deeper level. The fundamental purpose

behind her approach was not to simply to control her students' behavior. Instead, Sarah hoped that her students might experience personal growth.

Distinctive Directions

After observing in Sarah's classroom across the course of a school year, as well as talking to her regularly about her beliefs and practices, I would argue that Sarah's approach to classroom management differed from an assertive discipline approach in two ways. First, and most fundamental, Sarah's approach was built upon a distinctively different belief and purpose - that of fostering the growth of moral intelligence and respectful, responsible citizenship that went deeper than surface compliance. Second, Sarah's management approach was coupled with classroom discussions and opportunities for "caring" that served the greater purpose of internal growth as well. Collectively, the tone set within Sarah's classroom seemed to be quite distant from the sense of inflexible, systematic application of rules, consequences and rewards that is generally associated with an assertive discipline model.

At the essence of assertive discipline is the identification of a teacher's wants and needs, along with determining what means the teacher should then go about in order to ensure that those needs are met. Following this line of thought, the teacher carries out his or her plans as part of maintaining a sense of control in the classroom. Kohn (1993) asks his readers to consider, "Who really benefits when a child quiets down and sits still?" (p. 29), going on to support his belief that the benefactor of classroom control is, inevitably, the teacher. Kohn proceeds to state, however, that there are certainly circumstances, "especially where children are involved, in which it is difficult to imagine eliminating all vestiges of control." He then proposes a rough guideline for determining what he refers to as "degrees of control," explaining:

> "We need to look at the intention of the rewarder, the perception of the rewardee and various characteristics of the reward itself. The first step is to examine our own motivation; are we ultimately trying to teach a skill, promote a value, boost self-esteem, or are we mostly interested in making someone do what we want? Next, we might try to put ourselves in the reward recipient's shoes and imagine whether she might feel manipulated, irrespective of our intentions" (p. 31).

Looking Beyond the Surface. As an observer, I perceived that Sarah's intentions were clear. Her goals, as stated in the summer months, persisted across the course of the year. Sarah hoped that her class would grow towards becoming a supportive, respectful community in which all class members contributed to the life of the group as a whole in responsible, morally intelligent ways. She also desired for her students to learn, challenging themselves to think about new ideas and try new things based upon what they were learning. Whenever Sarah introduced a classroom management idea or "system," she did so with these original purposes in mind. All four of her general class expectations were centered upon these two goals. "Treat others as you want to be treated" and "Respect teachers, students and all staff" were connected with the growth of moral intelligence and respectful, responsible actions. "Follow all directions" and "Complete all assigned work on time" were related to building responsible learning habits. Sarah maintained these four expectations for the entire year, not adding to or deleting any of them. She did, however, alter her management "support systems" on several occasions.

In November, Sarah began to move away from the individual listening coupons her students were receiving, opting instead to provide the kids with "team cooperation" points for working well in small groups. When introducing the team cooperation idea, she told her students, *"While everyone is in charge of themselves, I noticed recently that some people are doing a good job helping their neighbors . . . "* In the weeks that followed, Sarah provided team cooperation points when table groups worked well together in a variety of ways. When Evan convinced Anthony to sit down and listen during class time, their team received a point. When Chip's teammates, Brittany, Regina, Erin and Meredith, provided him with patient guidance through his early morning crankiness, their team received points. On many occasions when students assisted each other during the reading of a book or clean up of an art activity, their teams received points.

In February, Sarah extended the focus within the classroom by specifically considering what it would mean to act in *"kind and caring"* ways. The children submitted personal votes to Sarah which stated whether or not they wanted to be part of a *"kind and caring classroom."* All of them responded that they wanted to do so. As the

month proceeded, Sarah made a practice of moving children "up" on the point chart when they displayed acts of kindness to another classmate.

Both the Team Cooperation Chart and the Kind and Caring points complemented the original classroom expectations concerning treatment of and respect for others. I perceived that Sarah introduced these modifications as means of adding fresh emphasis to this central purpose when she sensed that her students needed it. Sarah's approaches to working with her students were consistently connected to needs and interests that she observed over the course of time. McLaren (1989) states, "The pedagogy that I propose takes the problems and needs of the students themselves as its starting point" (p. 226). Whenever Sarah shifted strategies, she explained to me her rationale for doing so by describing her perception of what various events or conversations with kids had signaled to her concerning their needs.

Over time, I perceived that Sarah's purpose for classroom management systems was closely tied to a type of "character development" that she hoped for each of her students. Earnest Boyer, in The Basic School (1995), describes a similar purpose: "The Basic School is concerned with the ethical and moral dimensions of a child's life. The goal is to assure that all students, on leaving school, will have developed a keen sense of personal and civic responsibility . . . core virtues . . . are emphasized" (p. 173). Boyer then goes on to list seven virtues that he suggests as starting points for emphasis at the Basic School. The virtues include honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance and giving (pp. 180-185). These virtues align quite closely with the purposes that Sarah established for her students.

Sarah was committed to looking beyond just surface behaviors; she was more interested in the growth of her students as moral beings than she was worried about how many points they received in a given day. Coupled with her hope for their growth was her commitment to building a solid relationship with Alton, Erin, Evan and each of their classmates, as discussed in chapter four. Sarah consistently sought to find ways to express her belief in and commitment to her students as persons, while at the same time she maintained expectations that each class member needed to act responsibly and respectfully as members of a larger group. Her conception of "discipline" or

"consequences for behavior" was somewhat aligned with what Goodman (1992) describes as:

> "based largely on the ethics of caring, in which the superordinate has greater concern for disciplining in ways that promote feelings of mutual respect, affection and comfort than for deciding whether or not a child is receiving 'just treatment:' that is, as an act of caring, teachers and administrators face the problem of creating an environment in which students feel affirmed and cared for while at the same time their behavior is being evaluated and often restricted" (p. 114).

In the sense that Goodman describes, Sarah consistently promoted feelings of mutual respect, affection and comfort amongst all of her students. Her relationships with students were foundational to their work within the classroom. Perhaps unlike Goodman, however, Sarah did not emphasize the restriction of behavior. Instead, she focused upon choices that students had, and she talked with students individually about what the consequences of their choices might be. Frequently, I heard Sarah say to students, *"It's your choice . . . ,"* going on to explain what choices the student had and what might result from the possible choices they could make. Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997) describe a similar practice:

> "As a teacher, you can help your students succeed by offering them an appropriate choice between two acceptable options . . . Many times a choice is not appropriate. It's not appropriate, for instance, to give students a choice about whether or not they want to learn to read, to go to school, hurt someone else, be in a dangerous situation such as climbing on the roof, and so on. Examples of appropriate limited choices are: 'You may read this book or this book,' 'It's not okay to hurt your classmate. You can apologize now or take some time to cool off.'" (pp. 160-161)

In a like fashion, I heard Sarah say to Anthony one day when he was angry, *"Anthony, you may join us for reading or you may give yourself a cool down period until you feel ready."* And when Evan disrupted in class, Sarah suggested, *"You may participate with our group, you may cool down at the single desk, or you may cool down in Mrs. Campbell's room."*

Even the classroom expectations that Sarah established were not specific "rules," but rather, general guidelines for actions. Within these broad parameters, children had a great deal of freedom for determining what to do amongst their classmates. Vivan Paley

(1992) writes about a rule that she introduced to her students, "Our new rule is different. It gives us a useful perspective from which to view our actions" (p. 114). In a similar way, Sarah's rules served as examination points. Often when a student's behavior was in question, Sarah asked the student whether or not the action aligned with their class purposes. A representative instance was during the *"kind and caring talk,"* held the day after the class in general had been particularly unkind in their treatment of one another. Sarah expressed to the children, *"People threw things yesterday. People hurt. People kicked. People got hurt . . . is that being a good neighbor?"* On another occasion, when a sizable amount of learning time had been sacrificed one week due to disruptions and students wandering around when they were asked to participate in learning activities, Sarah confronted the students again. *"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."* She went on to tell them that any learning time missed for the next few days would need to be made up during Center Time, further explaining, *"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."* Following this discussion, there were several occasions upon which Sarah provided various students who didn't want to participate in class with the choice to complete an assignment with the class or to finish it during center time. She made it clear, however, that there were two options that were not acceptable choices, both related to her central purposes. First, it was not acceptable for students to mistreat others. Second, it was not acceptable to opt out of learning.

On those occasions when students chose to act in ways that violated either of the two central purposes of the classroom community, Sarah did let them know that their actions would prompt consequences. For example, when Anthony refused to do school work, Sarah reminded him that he could not get credit for assignments he did not do, and that his grades would suffer. When Donald wandered off during class time, Sarah asked him to sit down during times of the day such as Center time to complete his work. When Evan broke the classroom easel, Sarah mentioned to him that they needed to figure out a

way to fix it. When Alton hit others, Sarah, as well as Mr. Dixon, clearly let him know that he could not stay in school on those days. In each of these instances, Sarah discussed with the student both their actions and the possible consequences.

Strategic Supports. Perhaps more importantly, though, Sarah discussed with her students what she could do to support them in the future toward positive actions in the area of behavior that they were struggling with. For instance, when Anthony's grades were in question, Sarah talked with him about whether or not it might be a good idea to involve his mother. Following their conversation, Sarah phoned Anthony's mother, and the two of them decided to maintain the postcard system for communicating regularly about Anthony's efforts. When Donald had continuing difficulties sitting in his chair to do school work, Sarah experimented with a wide array of efforts toward supporting him, in conjunction with talking with him regularly about his *"job"* as a learner. She sat him in close proximity to her, and she provided him with a glass jar in which she dropped marbles to signify that she had noticed his efforts. Ultimately, though, Sarah noticed how positively Donald seemed to respond to her greetings, notes and hugs. Given what she perceived, Sarah's efforts to build a relationship with Donald increased.

When Evan broke the easel, Sarah talked with him at length about what they might do as a result. She described their conversation to me:

> *"We sat down and talked about it the next morning . . . 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."*

Following the incident with the easel, Sarah worked out a contract system for Evan which focused upon increments of time during which he could act in positive, responsible ways within the classroom. Evan provided some input toward the establishment of the contract, telling Sarah not only what he wanted to work for, but also how often he believed that Sarah needed to check on his behavior. Sarah and Alton established a similar contract, although the time increments and goals were uniquely his.

About the contract agreements, Sarah told me in a November interview, *"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 . . . but I think it was good for them 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."*

The "discipline" that Sarah provided when she felt it was needed was distinctive in that it focused upon not only retribution, but also upon possibilities for growth. For instance, not only did Evan repair the easel that he broke, but he did so in the company of the school janitor, a person whom Sarah believed could have a positive influence on him. In a similar fashion, after Evan was dismissed from Music class for poor behavior, Sarah asked him to join her in eating lunch with the Music teacher during the following week, in hopes that they might work together toward establishing a positive relationship. Through creating opportunities such as these, Sarah provided Evan with possibilities for personal growth. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) challenge educators to, "make sure consequences are helpful, not hurtful . . . rather than focusing on making students 'pay' for what they've done, look for solutions that will help them learn for the future" (pp. 204-205). Sarah made consistent efforts to move in this direction.

Timely Discussions. Not only did Sarah talk individually with students about how they might work together to support positive growth, but she also talked to the class as a whole about their development as a group. During class talks such as the *"Team Cooperation Talk"* and the *"Kind and Caring Talk,"* Sarah shared with her students not only the rudiments of the system that would be used, but she also discussed with them why it would be used and focused the conversation upon the basic goals of respectful citizenship and learning. In this sense, her practice differed greatly from an assertive discipline model, which tends to focus fundamentally upon concrete actions, consequences and rewards, rather than reasons and goals for growth. Kohn (1993) states, "It takes courage and thought . . . effort and patience to explain respectfully to six year olds the reason for your request. It takes talent and time to help them develop the skill of self-control and the commitment to behave responsibly. But it takes no courage, no

thought, no effort, no patience, no talent and no time to announce, 'Keep quiet and here's what you'll get'" (p. 16). Sarah actively sought to go beyond directives; she consistently provided reasons and examples, and she invited the children to question and respond to the ideas she presented.

Sarah's conversations with her students about their shared responsibilities as community members were not limited to discussions related to classroom management policies and "systems." In addition, Sarah initiated regular conversations with her kids, often during morning "rug time," which were relevant to their growth as community members. Over the course of the year, I listened in on discussions about what it means to be a friend to someone, about how to act respectfully with other children and adults throughout the school, about how we can learn from those who are different than we are (in this case, during a discussion of Native American culture), and about what to do when we feel like throwing a temper tantrum. Because I wasn't in Sarah's classroom daily, she described for me several conversations that I missed. Of significance were a discussion near the beginning of the year about what it means to work and learn during independent work times, and a discussion near the end of the year about what it means to be considered trustworthy.

Sarah's conversations with her students were quite similar to what many educators refer to as "class meetings" (Goodman, 1992; McLaren, 1989; Nelsen, et. al., 1997; Kohn, 1993). Kohn describes the type of focus that a class meeting might have: "Sometimes we will want to discuss with children what it means to act responsibly and compassionately - not lecture to them so their eyes glaze over, but explore together how one might deal with difficult situations" (p. 242). He emphasizes also that this type of discussion provides a teacher with a chance to "open up" an issue with children, asserting that to leave out the opportunity for discussion is to "deprive children of a chance to think and talk about the importance of what they have seen so as to more fully incorporate it into their repertoires" (p. 241).

Essential to the concept of class meetings is the possibility that students have to ask questions, extend ideas, or raise concerns that they have about issues that are discussed. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) posit that their participation in this type of

discussion sharpens both their communication skills and their understandings of what it means to be a community member: "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). These authors add that it is essential for teachers to listen carefully to their students as part of the class meeting process. They write, "We often assume we know what students think and feel without asking them," (pp. 20-21) warning that this type of assumption can lead to misunderstandings of students' perceptions. For both teacher and students alike, the class meeting process invites the opportunity to participate in dialogue as both listeners and sharers. Noddings (1992) suggests that, "Dialogue is essential in learning how to create and maintain caring relations with intimate others - part of what's learned in dialogue is interpersonal reasoning - the capacity to communicate, share decision making, arrive at compromises, and support each other in solving everyday problems" (p. 53).

In Sarah's classroom, the conversations that I listened in on consistently involved listening and sharing on the parts of both Sarah and her students. I observed, with surprise on some occasions, a significant degree of reciprocity that characterized some of the dialogues I witnessed. Sarah openly admitted, in several instances, that the actions and words of the children had impact upon her. The February *"kind and caring talk"* is a marked example of this. Sarah opened the conversation by admitting to the children, *"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."* Further in the conversation, she admitted, *"I went home and stamped and raved."* Sarah was willing to show her vulnerability to her students; she did not paint a picture of herself as perfect, but rather as someone who also struggled with actions and attitudes. At another point in the school year, when discussing how to control temper tantrums, Sarah told the kids, *"Sometimes when I'm angry I draw or write or scribble hard on a piece of paper,"* and she modeled scribbling on paper to show them how it looked.

Robert Coles (1997) writes of the influence of his mother, "She told us about how she wasn't perfect . . . not told in such a way that she'd emerge, craftily, as the impossibly

good person . . . but told in a comradely fashion, as if she and we were in something together" (p. 186). In this tradition, Sarah talked with her students from the perspective of a human being, and she listened as one. When students had questions, she answered them respectfully or opened the floor for other students to respond. When students wanted to share personal examples, Sarah listened. She listened when Ronnie explained that the golden rule meant, "Do it as you want them to do it back," and when Evan said that completing all assigned work meant, "Bring your homework folder home." She supported Christy's explanation of what to do if you have a temper tantrum, and she affirmed Evan when he told her, "I'm having a good day today." Class meetings within Sarah's classroom were occasions during which all class members had the opportunity to listen and to be heard.

There were also instances, both during class meetings and on other occasions, when students made statements that were inconsistent with Sarah's views concerning respectful treatment of others. In some of these situations, Sarah enforced classroom consequences such as moving a child's clip down on the chart. This occurred, for instance, when Anthony told Chip, "You white - you ugly," and when Alton told Sarah, "No," at her request to stop tearing the class chart. On other occasions, Sarah presented small groups of students with the opportunity to talk through disagreements or behavioral dilemmas. Although Sarah served as a facilitator during these situations, she also provided the students with opportunities to make their own decisions about how to resolve the problems. Sarah clearly expressed that the students were capable of making good decisions concerning the issues presented and that she trusted them to do so.

In January, Meredith and Ronnie were teased unmercifully across the course of a lunch period one day, laughed at by Jonathan, Chip and Erin for "liking each other." Both children were close to tears upon returning to the classroom and had eaten very little. On the following day, Sarah asked that the five students involved remain in the classroom at lunch time for a meeting. Sarah opened the meeting by asking Ronnie and Meredith to share their stories first. After they had finished, Sarah then asked the other three children to speak. When little was said, Sarah redirected her question, asking the three, *"Would any of you like to have someone tease you for thirty minutes?"* All three shook their

heads. Sarah reminded them of the class expectation concerning treating others as you wish to be treated and asked that the three might now figure out what to do about this problem, recommending that they consider apologizing. While all three children were willing to apologize, the recommendations for resolution did not stop there. Jonathan told the group, "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 the three, "Would you like to do that this week maybe? Then next week would it be nice to move back?" All three agreed to his idea and followed through with it.

On other occasions, as well, Sarah specifically directed her students toward coming up with their own resolutions to problems. Frequently when children squabbled during class time, Sarah asked those involved to step into the hallway for a moment and work out the problem. This occurred, for example, when Ronnie kicked Meredith underneath the desks and Meredith complained to Sarah, and also when Erin and Evan bickered back and forth. In each situation, the children returned of their own accord within a couple of minutes, and the problem was not mentioned again.

In a wide range of situations, it was apparent that the classroom expectations Sarah had introduced to students were used as touchstones for considering whether or not an action was appropriate, as well as for determining direction of further actions. In this sense, the boundaries or expectations for children's actions were established by Sarah. Regardless, I observed that, as Celia Oyler (1996) writes, "Providing parameters does not preclude allowing student initiations into the classroom" (p. 45). Students were asked to actively think through the events that occurred, to talk about whether or not the actions were responsible and respectful, and to recommend what they might be able to do to resolve present conflicts and/or act responsibly on future occasions.

Growth

Having had the opportunity to observe Sarah and her students over the course of a complete school year, I was able to witness the growth that the class experienced - as respectful community members and as responsible learners. I perceived that this process

was characterized by an up and down, sometimes unpredictable movement towards growth, in a three steps forward, two steps back fashion. Sarah's expectations of her students were based on the hope of growth, not a focus upon perfection. Also, the process of growth in Sarah's classroom was reflective of a gradual move away from dependence upon extrinsic motivation and towards an intrinsic understanding of what it means to act responsibly and respectfully. And, finally, the move toward growth amongst this community was evidenced through wide-ranging opportunities to show care that were continually introduced to the children as possibilities for action.

Living Within the Unpredictable. Coles (1997) reminds his readers, "We don't conquer this world's mischief and wrongdoing and malice once and for all, and then forever after enjoy the moral harvest of that victory. Rather, we struggle along, even stumble along from day to day, in need of taking stock yet again, with the help of . . . the experiences that, inevitably and not so rarely, come into our daily lives" (p. 20). In Sarah's classroom, setbacks and growth, frustration and exultation, dilemma and real struggle could all occur within any given day or week. On a single day in November, Evan and Anthony were complimented for their lunch period behavior, Regina supported Erin's hesitant reading efforts, and Alton ripped the class chart paper and later hit Mr. Dixon. On a single day in January, Evan and Vincent drew a mean-spirited depiction drawing of Donald, and Alton promptly told them, "Quit being mean on Donald . . . Treat Donald like you want to be treated." A few days later, however, Alton hit Donald several times during library time. This pattern of unpredictable, backward and forward movement toward growth was very much representative of a sizable portion of the school year, extending through the fall and winter months.

Beginning some time in March and continuing through the end of the year, it appeared to me that growth towards positive actions and attitudes was more consistent. While there were still angry outbursts and disrespectful comments that occurred, the frequency and severity of these events diminished over time. An emerging sense of classroom community had been forged through dealing with issues of conflict and resolution on a daily basis. Coles (1997) writes that moral behavior develops as, "a response to moral experiences as they take place, day after day, in a family, a classroom."

He adds, "We grow morally as a consequence of learning how to be with others, how to behave in this world, a learning prompted by taking to heart what we have seen and heard" (pp. 3-5).

This process of struggle through much of the school year was difficult for Sarah. She admitted to me her worries about Donald's stealing habit, commenting that it was hard for her to figure out how to place trust in Donald while trying at the same time to ensure that the other children experienced a sense of safety within the classroom, not worrying that they might have items taken from their desks. She was well aware of the starts and jumps that took place for several of her students, including Donald, Alton and Evan in particular. In Evan's case, it was rewarding for Sarah to see him put a stop to a fight between younger children and bring the victimized child to Sarah for help during January, but it was discouraging for her to learn of the hateful mail message he wrote a few weeks later. By February, though, it was relieving to sense that Evan had, as Sarah explained, *"passed through whatever little phase had gripped him"* and was once again doing well in the classroom. Likewise, Alton's behaviors concerned Sarah a great deal. It was difficult to determine whether he might be supportive and helpful towards fellow students, or angry and volatile towards them, on any given day.

Throughout these incidents, Sarah struggled with modeling "morally intelligent" behavior, even when she was disheartened. On a couple of occasions, she admitted that she was disappointed or upset, or that she did not think things were *"working"* as she had hoped for the group. She told them when she went home angry or when she felt ready to give up on the participatory structure they had set up within the classroom, but added that she would remain committed to it anyway. Even when ready to quit, Sarah ultimately refocused on the hope that she held for her class and sought to move in that direction.

Integral to Sarah's commitment to maintaining hope was her expressed belief that growth amongst her students should be considered in terms of positive development, not in terms of attaining perfection. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) write, "Students know a teacher cares when the teacher encourages improvement instead of insisting on perfection" (p. 33). While Sarah maintained high expectations of her students as learners and community members, she continually noticed and encouraged small steps towards

growth in these areas, rather than focusing upon the "fine tuning" concerns that were of less importance at that particular time.

I remember being puzzled in November when Sarah allowed Alton and Michael to get up and leave the group for a "cool down" time on several occasions, wondering why Sarah might allow them to miss the discussion or activity that was taking place at that point. I realized later, however, that Sarah appreciated the growth that they were displaying in self-control during those occasions. She was seeking to focus on the growth areas of most importance to these children, rather than continually reminding them that their progress in other areas needed attention. She explained to me a month or so later, *"At that point I was kind of picking my battles with Alton.* (Some of his actions) *weren't as big a deal for him as hitting . . . they weren't his biggest issues at that point."*

For instance, Eastside School maintained the policy that each child should arrive in the morning, take off their coats and hats, and begin to participate in class when the day began at 8:30. Throughout most of the Fall, however, Alton persisted in leaving his hat and coat on until lunch time. Rather than participating in class, he would often sit with arms folded, staring straight ahead, and sometimes would put his head down and rest. Over time, Sarah determined that if she allowed him to determine the point at which he would take his coat off and begin to take part in class, he ultimately would decide to do so. Any attempts to coerce him, however, generally resulted in added resistance. Sarah spoke to John Dixon about Alton's behavior and suggested that she might work on other issues with him, such as the need to keep from hitting, while letting the coat and hat situation go unnoticed for the time being. John supported Sarah's decision, and they acted accordingly. As the year progressed and Alton's hitting episodes became less frequent, Sarah encouraged him to participate on progressively earlier occasions during the morning. Following the Christmas break, he consistently took his coat and hat off in the early morning and was in his desk ready to begin with the morning bell.

As in this situation with Alton, Sarah acted on her desire for each of her students to learn to think about how to manage their own actions, based upon internal senses of what might be a "good" thing to do. Sarah worried a lot about whether or not the management systems, that she had utilized for the purpose of supporting and guiding

children when they needed it, might also work in a negative way, breeding a kind of dependency upon extrinsic motivators. Given her concerns, Sarah incorporated into her classroom a wide range of opportunities in which students were expected to manage their own decisions concerning behaviors and learning activities. Carole Ames (1992) writes, "The teacher will need to help students learn the skills with which they can make the best use of their freedom. Opportunities to develop self-management and self-regulatory strategies must accompany the assignment of responsibility" (p. 266). In alignment with this statement, Sarah helped her students learn *how* to manage themselves by consistently modeling positive actions and by providing them with classroom expectations and management systems that served as guideposts within which they might act.

Coupled with these provisions, Sarah also focused considerably on the idea of choice with her students, as I've previously discussed. Sarah stressed that each student knew *"how to be good"* and that she had witnessed their respectful, responsible actions. Sarah was conveying to her students that, although the frameworks she offered provided students with guideposts, the decisions for actions and attitudes were solely theirs. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) write, "We are disrespectful to kids when we try to control their behavior. An important part of respect and encouragement is honoring a person's right to control his or her own behavior" (p. 171). Sarah made it clear to her students that she did not control their actions; they did. For example, on one occasion when Alton began to tear the class chart during reading time, Sarah addressed him by explaining that he could choose to stop tearing or choose to leave the group. She finished by asking him to, "Make a choice at the count of three." Several weeks later, when Anthony slammed his hand down on his desk and threw his hat onto the floor in an angry outburst, Sarah initially spoke to him quietly about calming himself down. When Anthony continued to act out, she then stated to him, *"You make the choice,"* letting him know that he would chose to lose a clip if he continued to disrupt.

<u>Learning to Respect, to Assume Responsibility and to Care</u>. During the early months of the school year, when Sarah talked about the issue of choice with her kids, she often related it to consequences that would occur as a result of choices - whether positive or negative. For instance, in the situations mentioned above, Alton knew that he would

go to the office if he chose to rip the paper further, and Anthony knew that his clip would be moved down on the 4-3-2-1 chart if he continued to disrupt. In addition, listening coupons were a concrete, frequently provided reminder that good listening was an acceptable behavior, and Fun Friday was a reminder that good citizenship over the course of a week was a "good" way to act within the classroom. Sarah emphasized to me early in the school year that she hoped she would be able to rely less and less upon these extrinsic reminders of acceptable or unacceptable behavior as the year progressed, and that the children might grow to the point that they could monitor their own behavior with sound intrinsic judgment without the need for outside motivators. By March, she told me that, "(at the beginning of the year) *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."* At this point in the school year, Sarah rarely used the listening coupons and team cooperation points, or the center/timer chart any longer. She still used the 4-3-2-1 chart and offered Fun Friday to those who acted responsibly each week, given the class expectations. Even with the 4-3-2-1 chart, however, the instances of moving clips up and down seemed to have decreased over time.

Toward the end of the year, many of Sarah's students seemed to be able to consider their actions and attitudes as "good" or "bad" without having to discuss whether or not they aligned with the classroom expectations or whether or not a "reward" or "consequence" was attached to it. In April, an incident took place one Friday which provided an interesting example of progress as morally intelligent community members which was not dependent upon external rewards. Anthony and Alton, who had not earned enough classroom points on the 4-3-2-1 chart to participate in Fun Friday, were visibly angry. While Sarah and the other students prepared to go outside to play, Anthony scowled and muttered, "I hate Fun Friday," and Alton kicked over his desk in protest. Despite their moods, Sarah suggested that I might work with the boys while the others were outside, engaging them in straightening up the room and doing "good deeds" in general. To my surprise, both boys agreed to this suggestion. When Sarah and the others

returned to the classroom, Alton had taken down a set of bulletin board materials and had straightened the bookshelves in the class library. Anthony had washed many of the desks around the room with soapy water. The boys never received any "reward" for their behavior, but participated in the activity willingly, and even eagerly. The responsible action that they participated in was, apparently, based upon their internal, autonomous desire to do something good, rather than their hope to receive a prize for doing so. Maxine Greene (1988) describes this type of autonomous responsibility as, "to be capable of acting in accord with internalized norms and principles" (p. 118).

Sarah's suggestion to Alton and Anthony that Friday was just one example of the many occasions on which she offered ideas to her students concerning how they might physically show responsibility, respect, even "care" for others within the classroom or across the school building. Kohn (1993) suggests that it is important to "provide an array of opportunities for (students) to experience the practice (of caring) firsthand: caring for pets, looking out for younger siblings, tutoring other children, working with classmates to make decisions and solve problems and so on" (p. 243). In this respect, Sarah offered her students the opportunity to read to preschool and kindergarten. She asked students to help one another in learning situations. She suggested that team members might support each other towards completion of classroom tasks. She asked students what classroom "jobs" they might want to volunteer for in a given week. She complimented acts of kindness that she observed. And she consistently modeled the support, helpfulness and acts of kindness that she suggested to her students. Noddings (1992) writes, "In supportive environments where children learn how to respond to dependable caring, they can begin to develop the capacity to care. Whether their caring will be directed to the people around them . . . depends in part on the expectations of their teachers - the adults who guide them and serve as models for them" (p. 52).

Sarah's actions and expectations consistently focused upon caring for people. Her hope was that as each person within the class grew as a morally intelligent community member, they might sense that their contributions were valued, that they could both give and receive support, and that they were part of an "us" within Sarah's classroom. An internalized sense of security as a community member was an essential foundation for

learning within Sarah's classroom.

CHAPTER SIX

EXTENDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO CONTRIBUTE AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Early in the school year, Sarah expressed to me her hope that not only would her students see themselves as "good," but that they also might perceive themselves as "smart" kids. Towards this purpose, not only did she provide for students to grow as morally intelligent classroom citizens, but she also constructed opportunities through which students could share ideas, talents and authority as knowledge bearers within what Sudia McCaleb (1994) has called a "community of learners." Through practices such as inviting children to share personal knowledge, make collaborative class decisions, develop and carry out their own inquiry research projects and teach one another about their areas of expertise, Sarah revealed the value that she placed upon student contributions and her commitment to nurture their contributions. She did not desire for her students to passively receive information within her classroom, but rather, to help her actively construct what would be considered knowledge.

The practices that I observed in Sarah's classroom closely match a statement made by Harvey Daniels (1995), Director of the Center for City Schools in Evanston, Illinois, who described classrooms where he saw:

> "more acting on the principles of democracy . . . more cooperative and collaborative activity, more heterogenous groups, and the classroom is an interdependent community. Kids have more choices . . . much of the time they pick their own books to read, their own subjects to write about, their own partners to work with, their own projects to research and topics to investigate . . . choice also means more responsibility . . . for their work, for setting goals, for monitoring their work, for finding and reading books, for selecting topics, for keeping their own records and for evaluating themselves" (Miner, 1995, p. 116).

Sarah operated her classroom based upon "principles of democracy" in the sense that Daniels describes, as she frequently offered students the opportunity to participate in decisions and make choices that would directly affect them. Sarah's students chose books to read during morning reading time, their selections ranging from <u>How a Kitten is Born</u> to the "Goosebumps" series. They selected their own inquiry topics to research and write

about, picking topics such as football, Barbies and sharks. On many occasions, Sarah offered them the opportunity to pick a partner, for activities such as giving partner spelling tests, trading stories they had written for peer editing, or working through Math problem solving as a pair.

Pat Shannon (1993) describes democracy as a system in which people participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives. Sarah's students certainly participated in decisions that affected their classroom lives. Given the eagerness they often displayed when begging Sarah or me to listen to them read "their" book, or when asking if they could read "their" story, or when presenting their inquiry project to classmates, I believe that the decisions they made were very meaningful to them.

As Sarah offered students frequent opportunities to make decisions and choices about aspects of classroom life that impacted them, she followed a pattern that educator Celia Oyler (1996) refers to as "sharing authority." Oyler connects this conception to the notion of how power is disseminated amongst teacher and students. She writes, "Seth Kreisberg's (1992) notion of *power with*, versus *power over*, is helpful. As teachers strive toward positions of *power with* students, they develop relations of 'co-agency' . . . characterized by people finding ways to satisfy their desires and to fulfill their interests without imposing on one another" (p. 23). Oyler frames this idea by explaining that sharing authority within the classroom has two dimensions, both a content dimension - "what counts as knowledge and who is a 'knower,'" and a process dimension - "who gets to do what, where, when and how" (p. 21).

Dimensions of Authority

I observed what I believed to be evidences of the content dimension of authority in Sarah's classroom when I considered Sarah's responses to and invitations towards the ideas that students shared. Edelsky (1994) asserts that children in schools will not pursue the questions that really matter in their lives unless they are in an environment where their ideas and lives are valued. Sarah actively sought to convey to her students the positive value that she placed upon their contributions in a variety of situations. During informal occasions, such as when students were unpacking their bookbags each morning or during

class recreation time in the gym, Sarah listened with interest when Erin described a visit with her brother and when Evan talked about his successes during a basketball game. On occasions specifically designated for student sharing, such as the discussion of Legacy Boxes or during Museum Sharing time, Sarah admired and asked interested questions about Jonathan's dinosaur poster, Ronnie's electronic gadgets and the Easter eggs that Christy made with her mother. Sarah visibly treated the knowledge that each student brought to her classroom with respect and interest. McLaren (1989) writes that an important question to ask when considering how to empower children is, "How do we treat the knowledge that working class students bring to class discussions and schoolwork? Do we unwittingly devalue such knowledge and thereby disconfirm the voices of these students?" (p. 182) Sarah actively sought to value and confirm the voices of her students. She established venues like Museum Sharing, Star of the Week, Legacy Boxes and Personal News time for the purpose of offering students the chance to share what they knew and had experienced, finding ways to show these children to be knowledgeable. Sarah conveyed to her students, through her invitations and responses, that she "shared the ownership of knowing" with them, a concept described by Oldfather and Dahl (1994) as occurring when "the authority for knowing is shared by students and teachers alike" (pp. 145-146).

Interestingly, Celia Oyler (1996) asserts that the process of offering students opportunities to share their knowledge and experiences can be enlightening for a teacher. She suggests that through listening to students, teachers can become more acutely aware that their students are far more knowledgeable than they would have anticipated. Following several months during which first grade teacher, Anne Barry, regularly opened up the "floor" in her classroom to student contributions, Barry told Oyler, "I've never had kids give me things like this before. I would never know how much they know if I didn't allow this level of interaction. I'm sorry I never did it before" (p. 20). In this same sense, Sarah remarked to me on several occasions how impressed she was by her students' knowledge and expertise. Across the course of the year, I recall her descriptions of Anthony as *"smart as a whip"* and of Ronnie as *"very funny."* About Evan she said, "(he is) *so very bright . . . he could be a real leader."* Sarah regularly commented on the

positive qualities and contributions exhibited by her students.

The connection between providing opportunities for students to share knowledge and teachers conveying respect and value toward their contributions is closely related to the connection between the content and process dimensions of classroom authority. I believe that the two dimensions are inextricably interrelated. Conveying respect and value toward students' ideas encourages them to share their ideas when opportunities arise. Likewise, specifically inviting students to share ideas provides an opportunity to express value and respect toward each student as a knowledge bearer.

Oyler's (1996) definition of the process dimension of authority as "who gets to do what, when, where and how," suggests that opportunities for sharing authority can occur in various forms, across a range of times and spaces. In Sarah's classroom, invitations for students to contribute knowledge were clearly evidenced through the events she pre-established for this purpose, such as inviting student input during discussions and asking students to share personal stories. In addition, Sarah invited students to perceive themselves as knowledge bearers across the course of any given day through the participatory, interactive tone that was established within the classroom. Authority sharing was frequently connected with classroom discourse, a concept described by McLaren (1989) as "a regulated system - rules that govern what can be said, who can speak with authority, etc." (pp. 180-181).

In Sarah's classroom, not only did students share ideas when prompted, but they also expressed their ideas, as well as their reactions to and questions about the ideas of others, during daily classroom discussions. For instance, during "rug time" students frequently asked questions about books that Sarah read to them or expressed connections they made between occurrences in the books and events in their own lives. A representative example was Vincent's response to the Martin Luther King story: "Their mothers told them (black and white children) not to play together. But God invented us all, and we're all the same."

In addition, Sarah actively invited students to share their knowledge by asking thought-provoking, open-ended questions such as, *"How would you describe solids and liquids to a kindergartner?"* To this question, Evan responded that the outside of a Coca

Cola can was a solid, while the pop inside the can was liquid. Sarah also invited students to analyze ideas with her, rather than explaining information solely from her perspective. One example of this occurred when she asked them, *"What do you think oobleck is . . . a solid or a liquid?"* Student groups then listed the characteristics of the oobleck they had handled and responded to Sarah's query.

Ira Shor (1992) states that techniques within classroom discourse such as inviting students to speak from experience, analyzing concepts with the students' participation and posing thought-provoking, open-ended questions all "promote democratic dialogue for teachers and students" (pp. 96-97). Shor writes that these practices foster a participatory classroom environment, a "free speech classroom" in a sense, because it invites expressions from all students, and it thrives on a lively exchange of thoughts and feelings. Goodman (1992) connects this type of freedom of expression with the notion of "voice," which he describes by quoting Giroux and McLaren (1986) who state, "voice . . . refers to the means at our disposal - the discourses available to us - to make ourselves understood and listened to, and to define ourselves as active participants in the world" (p. 154). Active participation was central to the discourse practices within Sarah's classroom.

Across the course of the year, I learned that a spirit of positive active participation amongst Sarah's students was not instantly put into action, but, instead, cultivated over time. At the beginning of the year, Sarah shared with me that she hoped to nurture a *"student-centered classroom,"* and she proceeded to act amongst her students based upon this hope. Some students, such as Jonathan, Regina, Meredith and Christy, quickly responded to her invitations with positive contributions, while others, such as Evan, Alton and Chip, initially seemed to perceive the opportunities Sarah offered as license to act in ways that did not consider the best interests of others. Finally, there were those such as Sereita, Erin and Vincent, who held back a little bit during the early months of the year, seemingly unsure about whether or not to risk active participation when offered the opportunity to share or contribute. McLaren (1989) writes, "Teachers can do no better than to create agendas of possibility in their classrooms. Not every student will want to take part, but many will" (pp. 189-190). True to his statement, over the course of time, many of Sarah's students began to move increasingly toward positive, participatory roles

within the classroom community, although some proceeded more cautiously or more unpredictably than others.

As an observer, I wondered if the hesitation amongst some students might be due, in part, to their unfamiliarity with the way that authority was distributed within Sarah's room. My hunch was that, for at least some of the children, there was an expectation that authority and knowledge within a classroom rested with the teacher alone. They may have expected to participate mostly as docile recipients of knowledge transmitted from the teacher, rather than as co-constructors of learning. Sarah's teaching, instead, seemed to follow more of a constructivist model for learning. Oakes (1995) writes that a constructivist model "assumes that humans learn most effectively when they actively construct their own understanding of phenomena rather than being passive recipients of someone else's understanding" (p. 13). In addition, Sarah conveyed to her students, through both actions and words, that authority within the classroom was distributed in a wide range of ways, amongst them as well as herself. Rose (1995) refers to this practice as providing "multiple pathways of authority" (pp. 414-415) within a classroom, explaining that in such an environment, students move towards contributing, shaping directions and seeing themselves as authorities. Teacher, Bob Peterson (1994), provides examples of "pathways of authority" that he believed to be important amongst his own students throughout a similar pursuit, writing, "students need to be involved in making decisions. They need to work regularly in groups, They need a challenging curriculum - that involves not only listening but actually doing. They need to understand that it is OK to make mistakes, that learning involves more than getting 'right' answers" (p. 34). Over the course of the year, I was able to observe the "multiple pathways of authority" that Sarah offered to her students, some of which align with Peterson's suggestions, and others of which add to his ideas.

Multiple Pathways of Authority

Sarah opened up to her students pathways of authority by providing them with opportunities to share personal knowledge, to make decisions which impacted themselves and/or the class as a group, to investigate topics of interest through an inquiry-based

learning model, to "teach" their peers, to take on a variety of jobs and responsibilities, and to take part in collaborative learning experiences. In addition to, or perhaps as evidence of, these specific, ongoing opportunities, there was a pervasive sense of continual active participation in Sarah's classroom.

Sharing Personal Knowledge. Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson and Crawford (1996) write that a student-directed curriculum "starts with personal and social knowing . . . this means that teachers begin the curriculum by listening" (p. 174). During the very first week of school, Sarah invited her students to focus on what was meaningful to them personally. By day four, they were prepared to share their "Legacy Boxes" with classmates, boxes that the students brought from home filled with artifacts of personal significance. This event set the tone in the classroom for further opportunities, such as inquiry studies and personal news sharing, through which students might explore their own experiences and interests and share them within the classroom. Short and her co-authors (1996) write that this type of focus at the beginning of a school year is important because "students need time to become a community and to establish a supportive context" (p. 20). For this reason, a major focus within Short's classroom at the opening of a school year is, likewise, self-discovery. She adds that, "engagements with self, classroom and family give children a chance to get to know one another and to explore issues and topics close to their own experiences" (p. 42).

In Sarah's classroom, although the major curricular emphasis shifted over the course of the school year from a focus upon self toward a consideration of specific communities of people, including Native Americans, African Americans, and the people of China and Egypt, it was clear to me that Sarah maintained an emphasis upon the children's personal experiences through other means. "Star of the Week" allowed one child each week to create a poster about him or herself and to bring in items from home to decorate it. In addition, the "star" had the opportunity to sit in Sarah's rocking chair on Wednesday afternoon and answer questions that other students had about his or her interests and experiences. "Personal News" sharing time, which Sarah began during the winter months, also gave children the chance to talk about what was going on in their lives at any given time. Barbara Brodhagen (1995) describes a similar activity, "Sharing

Time," which she carried out with her seventh grade students, during which "students could share something they had done, that had happened, or that they had heard about" (p. 87). She adds that this particular activity helped build community amongst her students.

Oyler (1996) also notes the value of allowing students to share personal experiences, asserting that through this practice a teacher "shares her authority and allows the children to speak as experts" (p. 56). McLaren (1989) adds that a purpose of offering this type of opportunity to children is to "confirm and legitimate the knowledge and experiences through which students give meaning to their everyday lives" (p. 235). As children talk about their experiences and interests, they can begin to perceive themselves as knowledgeable. This sense of self-perception can serve as an undergirding foundation to a feeling of participating with shared authority within the classroom.

Decision Making. Within Sarah's classroom, students had ample opportunities to participate as decision makers in a wide range of situations. Peterson (1994) writes that in his classroom, "the parameters of students' decision-making range from choosing what they write, read and study, to deciding the nature of their collaborative projects, to helping establish the classroom's rules and curriculum" (p. 34). In a similar way, Sarah's students frequently chose books to read, topics to write about and subjects to study. They often selected projects to work on, as well as choosing partners with whom they would work. They voted on curriculum decisions, like which Native American tribe to study in depth as a class, and on behavioral decisions, like what might qualify a student for various privileges, or what consequences should be imposed given a specific behavior.

I was particularly impressed by the depth of decision making that was integrated into the independent reading time that children participated in daily. Not only did Sarah's students select their own books to read for this ten to fifteen minute time period, but they also chose where they would sit in the room, whether they would read alone or with a partner, and whether or not they would like to "sign up" to read their selection to a group of younger children. On several occasions during the school year, I arrived to observe during independent reading time and found the room almost silent. The children tucked themselves away, under tables, laying on the reading corner rug, on pillows or against the wall, and they read intently. Celia Oyler (1996) describes a similar practice within

teacher Anne Barry's room, which she referred to as "shared reading." Oyler explains, "Shared reading is an activity in which students direct how they interact with books and with whom this interaction takes place. They utilize most areas of the classroom . . . pick a partner or elect to read alone, select reading materials, and can move among locations, partners and materials. Shared reading is an activity in which sharing authority is embedded in the very structure of the routine." (p. 38) Sarah expressed to me that the independent reading time within her classroom had evolved a great deal over the course of the year, ranging from a few days at the beginning where students considered the time to be a sort of "free for all" and socialized more than they looked at books, to the period in winter and spring during which students immersed themselves in their books quite intently. Sarah told me that she became acutely aware of the change during April when students complained about not being able to have independent reading time one day. She told me, *"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 this was good; I think we've progressed!"*

Another area of decision making that was very much a part of Sarah's classroom involved daily decisions the children could make about things as simple as who they would sit by, what their team's name should be, or how a learning center should be run. Goodman (1992) writes, "Even such simple issues as how desks or others work spaces should be arranged in the class or the manner in which classrooms are decorated can give young children the opportunity to participate in decisions that directly affect their lives and, hence, provide them with a sense of power" (p. 119). Sarah offered her students index cards once every month, on which they wrote down the name(s) of classmates that they wanted to sit near; children could also ask to sit by themselves if they wanted to. Given their requests, new desk arrangements were made, and children were given the opportunity to sit near their friends of choice for as long as they continued to get along well with one another. In addition, towards the end of the school year when Sarah realized that the children would be "looping" with her into the third grade, she offered them the chance to suggest specific activities and "centers" that they would like to do during the third grade year. After considering each child's suggestions, Sarah confirmed

that she would plan to continue with well liked centers and activities such as inquiry and "doing a lot of big Math problems," as Evan wanted to do; she also stated that she would seek to prepare new activities for them such as the Lego building center that Alton suggested.

In other instances, Sarah provided what Goodman (1992) refers to as "choices within parameters set by the teacher" (p. 135). For example, students selected their own weekly spelling words from a larger list or "word pool" that was generally started by Sarah and added to by the children. During November, Sarah added a parameter to the process when she began to suggest an individual number of words that each child should use as their minimum number selected. Through this she hoped to encourage children to challenge themselves as they were able.

A daily activity that provided the children with opportunities to choose within parameters was that of "center time." Students were allowed to pick a center to work at, selecting from options such as Reading, Writing, Computers, Puzzles, Science, Math, Listening Station, and other special centers that were offered for short periods of time during the year in connection with current topics of study or interest, such as calligraphy, soap carving, Jumanji, fingerprinting, and paper folding. As the year began, Sarah announced that some centers could only "take" two students at a time, and others three. This created limits, as many of the well-liked centers were selected by those students with the first choices, and students who picked later had fewer options. To promote equity, Sarah rotated which students would pick first. On some occasions, she called on students by blindly pulling popsicle sticks, which had children's names printed on them. Sarah also decided that the Computer center could only be visited once per week by any given child, thus allowing more students to choose it. "Signing up" for centers became a much anticipated event every day for Sarah's students. They appeared eager to announce their center choices to her.

Finally, Sarah maintained a policy that students could choose to "opt out" of various activities that required public sharing or participation if they wanted to. Following this premise, a few students sometimes opted out of orally reading a story or journal entry that they had written. On one occasion, Erin, who tended to be shy, decided

not to participate in the "molecule show," during which the children participated as "actors." Sarah's response to Erin was supportive. She told her, *"That's fine. You can watch and listen from your desk, and you're still a part of the group."* A similar incident occurred when Chip chose not to read aloud his portion of the class poem that had been prepared for the student teacher. When Chip asked not to read, Sarah asked for a volunteer who might want to read his segment for him. Celia Oyler (1996) writes that the policy of allowing students to decline an invitation, in effect, "authenticates" the invitation. Students realize that they genuinely do have some authority concerning whether or not to accept.

Inquiry. The idea of decision making as a means of sharing authority extended heavily into the area of curriculum in Sarah's classroom through the implementation of inquiry-based learning. This approach is described by Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson and Crawford (1996) as a curricular model through which students select a question to pursue in depth, examine that question from a variety of perspectives by considering it collaboratively with other learners, investigate the question through a range of research possibilities, and construct meanings as a result of their study (p. 17). Sarah explained to me that she perceived inquiry-based learning to be distinctly connected to student-direction within a classroom. In our August interview, she told me, *"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."* Others have also written of the significance of learning through personal inquiry. John Dewey (1900) wrote:

> "If there is not an inherent attracting power in the material, then . . . the teacher will either attempt to surround the material with foreign attractiveness, making a bid or offering a bribe for attention by 'making the lesson interesting,' or else will resort to . . . low marks, threats of non-promotion, staying after school . . . But the attention thus gained always remains dependent upon something external . . . True, reflective attention, on the other hand, always involves judging, reasoning, deliberation; it means that the child has a question of his own and is actively engaged in seeking and selecting relevant material with which to answer it." (in Kohn, 1993, p. 198).

Providing children with the opportunity to act as inquirers moves them from

merely solving problems that a teacher suggests toward posing problems to solve and identifying their own areas of interest to examine. Nurturing student inquiries invites them to become "caught up in intellectual problems that are real to them" (Duckworth, 1996, p. 7). In this sense, academic learning can be personally meaningful, rather than simply informing a student of what others consider to be meaningful. In addition, inquiry learning promotes a sense of ownership; as educator Linda Rief (1992) writes, "Kids take ownership . . . when it matters to them" (p. 158). Interpreting Rief's use of ownership, I believe that for children, as for any of us, "ownership" or "connectedness" to academic learning can be nurtured by personal choice concerning both what we will study and how we will study.

Integrating inquiry-based learning into the overall curriculum provided Sarah's students with a balance between student-direction and teacher-imposition across their course of studies. There were certainly times during any given school day when Sarah required students to focus on "teacher-imposed" topics, such as learning place value in Math, studying China and Egypt, and considering Science areas such as matter and the weather. While Sarah rarely used textbooks with her students, she did base many of her curricular decisions, such as the choice of these focuses, upon requirements in the state SOLs for second grade. She explained to me in our August interview, however, that she believed the parameters provided within the second grade SOLs were *"very broad,"* and asserted that within the recommendations there was room for inquiry learning. Beyer (1996) describes the balance between student interest and curricular imposition as a sort of "power-sharing" that teachers work out with their students (p. 35). Ayers (1993) also speaks to this idea, writing that allowing for inquiry within an overall curriculum, "does not mean that anything goes or the teacher disappears . . . but youngsters need opportunities to choose, to name and to pursue their own passion and projects, to develop some part of the class on their own" (p. 93). The ideas that Ayers expresses support earlier assertions concerning "inquiry" learning made by John Dewey (1938). The inquiry-based learning within Sarah's curriculum certainly offered children opportunities to choose, to pursue, and to develop studies of their own interests.

Sarah's students chose to investigate a wide range of topics, which most of them

studied with great intensity. Topic choices varied greatly, including selections such as cartooning, the ocean, wrestling, police dogs and cooking. Some students opted to work with a group of others who wanted to focus on a common topic, while others chose to work on their own.

Once topics of study were selected, Sarah modeled the process of developing research questions, and each group or individual constructed a minimum of ten questions to begin their study with. After this occurred, Sarah joined Kelly, whose class was also involved in the inquiry process, and together they took on the role of resource providers. Both teachers searched for books, magazines, videotapes and other related materials for their students to peruse as they researched. As students looked through resources, collected information and synthesized what they read based upon their own experiences and understandings, initial research questions were sometimes answered and sometimes abandoned, and new questions were frequently raised. Through this type of exploration, students were given the opportunity to actively construct learning that was personally meaningful, rather than to passively receive knowledge. Their audible groans when inquiry time was postponed, excitement over creating projects, and pride when presenting their projects reflected this sense of personal meaningfulness. Kohn (1993) confirms the connection between inquiry-based learning and the constructivist perspective, writing:

> "people learn by actively constructing knowledge, weighing new information against their previous understanding, thinking about and working through discrepancies, and coming to a new understanding. In a classroom faithful to constructivist views, students are afforded numerous opportunities to explore phenomena or ideas, conjecture, share hypotheses with others, and revise their original thinking. Such a classroom differs sharply from one in which the teacher lectures exclusively, explains the 'right way' to solve a problem without allowing students to make some sense of their own, or denies the importance of students' own experiences or prior knowledge" (p. 219).

Within the inquiry-based learning model that Sarah provided for her students, authority was shared with students through the process of allowing them to self-direct their inquiry studies. Students not only chose their own topics, but they also constructed their own research questions, determined how they might present their learning, and sometimes initiated work on their inquiry studies outside of class time. Sarah further

confirmed authority sharing by emphasizing the value of personal ideas and experiences as valid sources of knowledge.

Teaching. As a culmination to the inquiry process, as well as in other situations across the curriculum, Sarah provided students with opportunities to share with classmates. She explained to the children that they would be *"teaching the class"* on these occasions. Specifically in preparation for the inquiry-related teaching presentations, Sarah guided students to consider a wide range of formats that they could select from as they determined how to present what they had learned to classmates. Sarah asked her students to join her in developing a list of possibilities that included options such as books, dioramas, models and puppet shows. Frequently, students selected ideas from this reference list; on occasion they opted for alternative formats, such as building a cardboard doghouse when studying "police dogs." Allowing students to freely select the mode of their choice for presentation aligns with a recommendation made by Cohen, Kepner and Swanson (1995), who suggest that it is important to engage students in "rich multiple-ability tasks, which provide everyone with the chance to be smart" (p. 22). They continue by asserting that offering options such as creating skits and presenting fashion shows, building models and constructing charts and posters, "enable a much wider range of students to make important contributions; they set the stage for challenging the assumption that there is only one way to be smart" (p. 23). Presentations in Sarah's room across the course of the school year included choices such as the construction of hanging mobiles, cooking and sharing brownies and jello, the creation of murals, shape books and posters, and the performance of skits - complete with student-made props.

Allowing for these possibilities effectively accomplished what Carini (1982) recommends, "inviting the contribution of each child's unique perspective to a community of interest" (p. 103). Sarah nurtured this sort of "community of interest," in part, by her guidance concerning the role of listeners. Sarah directed the child audience to listen respectfully, applaud for their peers, and provide positive comments and questions when the presenter solicited them. I admit that I wondered whether or not the children would meet her requests, guessing that on occasion they might tease or even make rude comments. Interestingly, though, the children listened with respectful attention, without

exception, during all of the inquiry presentations that I observed. I recall one instance when inquiry time took longer than usual. The group returning to Sarah's room from Kelly's room was waiting anxiously in the hallway while Vincent presented his football shape book. Not only did Sarah's group remain focused upon Vincent, despite the noise coming from the hallway group, but they also extended his presentation by making comments such as, "I like how you made it in the shape of a football," and questions such as, "Which team do you go for?" These children were genuinely interested in and supportive of Vincent's work.

There were several additional situations across the course of the year through which children received opportunities to teach their peers, particularly during the winter and spring months. In January, Alton became the primary teacher at the newly created paper folding center, when Sarah asked if he might like to assume this role after noticing his interest and talent in it. During February, partner groups taught the class about famous African American persons such as George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington, whom they had collaboratively researched. In April, individual children taught their peers how to work out various Math problems. In May, small groups of children developed Spelling activities that they introduced to the class as a whole for the purpose of reinforcing newly learned words. In addition to all of these opportunities, there were a variety of spontaneous child teaching events that occurred, such as Anthony's request to show the class group a pulley that he had devised while working at the science center.

Throughout these opportunities, children assumed an authoritative role by "directing their own and one another's attention" (Oyler, 1996, pp.153-154). They asked for the attention of the audience, sometimes explained that they were "waiting for eyes" before beginning, and often asked for questions and comments at the end of their teaching opportunities. Significantly, there were scattered instances across these teaching events when children appeared to be frustrated in their efforts and, subsequently, turned to Sarah for counsel or support. A representative occurrence was the Spelling activity idea presented by Christy and Chip late in the year. Both children had prepared a tag game which required "runners" to spell a word that the "tagger" asked of them once they were

caught. After listening to the directions given, the class proceeded to play the game. Shortly into it, though, it was apparent that few children were actually spelling words. Most, in fact, were running and dodging for the majority of the time, and the event looked more like a physical education activity than a spelling exercise. Christy became frustrated with the task of managing running behavior and remarked to Sarah that the game "isn't working." Sarah suggested that the students finish out the activity, however, before discussing ways to improve it. Once the children had returned to their seats, Sarah told the class as a whole that the teaching group had wanted the game to be more of a spelling game . . . and did the class have any ideas for the teachers? Together, Sarah and the children discussed suggestions, such as "Give clear directions," and "Make sure that everybody gets to practice their spelling." In effect, the process of teaching provided children with not only the opportunity to share their ideas, but also with the chance to self-evaluate, as Christy did when she assessed that the original plan was not working out as she had envisioned. Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson and Crawford (1996) write, "Presentations give learners an opportunity to determine what it is they know and where they still have questions" (p. 18). Wink (1997) connects the opportunity to talk in front of peers with the development of one's own cognition. As a teacher, Christy realized not only her role as a knowledgeable "director," but she also developed an awareness that being in a teaching position can, in effect, become a learning experience.

Jobs and responsibilities. In addition to teaching opportunities, Sarah offered her students the chance to take on classroom responsibilities through assuming jobs and helping roles. Each Monday morning, she changed the "Helping Hands" bulletin board, calling out each job and asking which students wanted to try for it. Sarah then collected the paper name tags for those students from the bulletin board display and randomly selected from the group of tags to determine which child would assume the job for that week. Available jobs included paper passer, lunch table cleaner, board washer, messenger, and so forth. Although there were jobs, such as bathroom clip monitor, which few children seemed anxious to take on, it was apparent that many of the tasks were willingly and even eagerly assumed. Nelsen, Glenn and Lott (1997) write, "Assigning

classroom jobs - giving students opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways - is one of the best methods of helping kids feel that they belong and are significant" (p. 161). In this regard, students can experience a sense of responsibility and pride in the maintenance of their classroom community.

Along with the learning opportunity offered through taking on weekly jobs, Sarah's students were also given the chance to responsibly maintain their classroom through daily upkeep of all materials and spaces that were shared amongst class members. Sarah made this responsibility explicit on some occasions, such as asking students who used the rug area pillows to return them, or those who pulled out the reading quilt to refold it and place it back on the rocking chair. Sarah frequently asked various children to take on tasks as needed, such as straightening the bookshelves, taking down old bulletin board materials, or taping up pictures or signs that started to pull away from the wall. On almost all occasions when Sarah asked students to assume these tasks, they did so without complaining. Even on the day when Alton and Anthony sat angrily in the classroom because they were not eligible to attend Fun Friday, both boys willingly participated in room maintenance tasks, Anthony washing desks and Alton taking down bulletin board materials.

When special materials were required for class activities, such as Science experiment items or Math manipulatives, Sarah asked the students to handle the items with care and place them back in appropriate places when the activity was completed. An instance that represents this practice occurred when the students experimented with boxes of various size magnets. Sarah had borrowed the magnet sets, which looked almost new, from the teachers who ran the TAG (Talented and Gifted) program in the building. She told her students that although these materials were generally reserved for older children, she had confidence that they could handle them responsibly. Throughout the magnet activity, Sarah's children moved carefully with the magnets, and returned all of the pieces to their boxes willingly upon her request.

Although this incident may seem trivial, it signaled to me that Sarah wanted students to know that she believed they could handle the responsibility they were given. Celia Oyler (1996) writes of a similar occurrence in first grade teacher Anne Barry's

classroom when Anne asked her students to take on the responsibility of material maintenance. She explains, "By permitting students to return materials, she was indicating a few things to them: She viewed them as knowledgeable regarding where her materials belonged; she saw them as capable of completing this task expeditiously; and she thought of them as honest regarding the ownership of materials" (p. 40).

An event at the end of the school year in Sarah's classroom served a similar purpose. On the next to last day of school, Sarah told her students that she wanted to solicit their help in taking down the items that decorated the room. She explained that as a former fourth grade teacher, she had asked students to take on this role and that they had handled it well. She expressed her confidence that this group of second graders could also perform this task responsibly. Sarah listed on the board twenty jobs that needed to be taken care of, such as cleaning the art cabinet, taking down posters and packing books in crates, and then she asked children which assignments they wanted to work on first. All of Sarah's students eagerly signed up for tasks, some working in pairs and others on their own. The children spent almost an hour and a half working on the room as Chip's "Space Jam" audio tape played in the background and the kids sang along. Although several members of the group became a bit loud and unfocused during the last fifteen to twenty minutes of the assigned work, for the vast majority of the time all of the children worked intently and cooperated well with each other. First and Gray (1991) assert that the act of having children manage classroom materials themselves serves as "a part of the process of helping them learn self-reliance and responsibility" (p. 95). For Sarah's students, her expressed belief that they could and would carry out this task responsibly was part of her ongoing message to them concerning how good, capable and smart they were. The belief she shared about their abilities should have supported their perceptions of themselves as capable of sharing authoritative roles.

Collaborative Learning. In Sarah's classroom, children participated in a variety of shared or "collaborative" learning experiences with others, such as participating in inquiry groups, doing hands-on Math and Science activities in pairs or small groups, and reading and editing the written work of their peers. Several professional educators write of the connection between collaborative learning opportunities and students assuming active

roles within the classroom community. The link between the two is largely centered around the existence of social support that is characteristic of many collaborative situations, which stands in contrast to a highly competitive, individualistic learning environment. Quartz (1995) writes that only when members of a classroom community move away from individualistic and competitive modes of interaction can they move towards "norms of care, trust and common purpose" (pp. 244-245).

The literature concerning the impact of collaborative learning upon groups of minority students is particularly positive. Heath and Mangiola (1991) write that, "In the three areas deemed important for the school instruction of minority students - school achievement, creation of positive race relations and socialization toward social values - cooperative learning always shows more positive results than traditional learning does" (p. 55). McCaleb (1994) cites research which reveals that "marginalized students attain higher achievement levels when they learn in the context of a cooperative classroom (Kagan, 1986) . . . yet when these students are forced into a competitive situation, they often lose their spirit of motivation" (p. 21). And one large-scale study of fifth grade classrooms in the Chicago area suggested that children's involvement was highest when they were working cooperatively (Stodolsky, 1988).

All of these findings support the emphases regarding competition and cooperation that Sarah purported within her classroom. With the introduction of "teams" and "team cooperation points" during November, Sarah expressed her regard for *"working well together."* Student teams sat together, frequently helped one another when working on learning tasks, shared materials, and sometimes urged each other to follow class rules for the sake of the team as a whole. On occasion students would follow directives given by their peers even more quickly than they responded to Sarah's requests. For instance, when Evan chose to do so, he frequently had good success in channeling Anthony's energies in positive directions, and Meredith and Christy often had a calming impact upon Chip during his cranky periods in the morning. Sometimes when Chip could not seem to find his reading or writing materials and complained in frustration, the girls on his team "mothered" him to a degree, helping him locate what he needed so that he could begin his work.

Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) posit that their goal as educators is to establish a classroom community whose members feel valued, personally connected to one another and committed to everyone's growth and learning (p. 16). Sarah's emphasis upon team cooperation certainly moved the tone of the community towards these directions. At times, particularly towards the beginning of the year, children urged their team members towards positive behaviors for the sake of their own interests, hoping to attain team points for cooperation as a group, such as when Evan reprimanded Anthony for not being in his seat on time, causing their group to miss an opportunity for earning points. Across the course of the year, some of this motivation seem to persist. In the winter and spring months, however, general acts of support toward other children became more spontaneous and seemingly unrelated to external rewards. For example, Alton surprised me a great deal in February when he rebuked classmates who made fun of Donald, and during May I observed Evan gently assisting Chip throughout their collaborative efforts to read through a difficult book. In addition, students became more apt to ask for assistance from their peers as the year progressed. Many asked Alton to assist with their drawings at various points, some asked Meredith, Christy and Jonathan to help them spell words, and reading became a shared event on many occasions. Over time, students began to follow Sarah's lead in both acting respectfully towards others and valuing what others had to offer.

The sense of collaboration nurtured within Sarah's classroom came as a result not only of Sarah's modeling or use of team cooperation points, but also as a result of curricular activities she promoted that required collaboration. Second grade teacher, Krista Sorensen (1996), writes that "through activities such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, peer editing, cooperative researching, etc., students begin to see the value of peer input and collaboration in the learning process" (p. 89). In Sarah's room, students had opportunities to research and write in teams during inquiry-based projects and selected social studies projects such as their Native American tribe studies and famous African American reports. When working on individual writings, students were frequently directed to edit with peers. Students regularly grouped for working on Science experiments such as the oobleck project or the magnet study. They also worked with

partners to practice spelling words and give weekly spelling tests. Through all of these instances, students were exposed to the perception that they were worthy helpers to peers and also recipients of valuable assistance from peers. As Oyler (1996) writes, students are capable of coming to use each other as resources, and in so doing, to share authority with the teacher as the need arises amongst class members (p. 7).

Continual Active Participation. Walking into Sarah's classroom on any given day, it was never very long before I observed the active participation of students across learning processes. Even if students were not immediately involved in sharing personal knowledge, making decisions, working on inquiry projects, participating in collaborative activities, assuming teaching roles or carrying out various jobs and responsibilities, a tone of active participation amongst students was still undeniable.

When Sarah led class discussions, she asked for student opinions and responses throughout these discussions. On many occasions, student contributions to these discussions were written onto large chart paper or the front blackboard for the class as a whole to be able to read. Although Sarah did not silence her own voice, she readily invited the voices of her students to be heard, and she referred to their ideas when furthering the discussion along. Sarah commended students who commented about or built on the ideas of their peers, frequently making statements such as, *"I liked how you added to Evan's idea."* An observation made by Celia Oyler (1996) aligns closely with what I observed of Sarah, "Anne worked to link these students' discoveries into the large-group discussion, thus feeding the body of shared knowledge with the work of the individual members as well as the group" (p. 134).

On the whole, student understandings, discoveries, questions and experiences were consistently valued, with the single exception of comments that demeaned other children, such as Vincent's comment that Erin "belonged in first grade," when she stumbled over words while reading. When incidents such as this one occurred, Sarah often addressed the comment or action as "unkind" or "ugly" and usually moved the clip of the offender down one level. On the vast majority of occasions, however, Sarah relentlessly sought ways to involve students as active constructors of knowledge. Not only did she solicit their verbal input, but she also invited them to physically participate

in learning activities, such as the oobleck experiment or the molecule show. She engaged them in class constructed projects such as a collaborative poem, the holiday cookbook and ten or more class books that incorporated the writings and drawings of each class member. The class activities that these children participated in on a daily basis were grounded in their contributions. As Mike Rose (1995) writes of various classrooms that he visited:

> "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" (p. 415).

Over time and through a wide range of structures and supports that Sarah implemented, her students showed that they could contribute positively to the shared knowledge and support bases that the community was constructing together. This was evidenced on an increasing basis as they displayed willingness to share their ideas during class discussions, as they actively participated in teaching roles, and as they took initiative to assist other class members. Although movement in this direction was marked by some student hesitance during the beginning months and scattered incidents of inappropriate student contributions over the course of the school year, these setbacks were not characteristic of the growth of the class as a whole. Opportunities for students to share authority with Sarah as knowledgeable persons and positive classroom citizens were abundant, and as students became accustomed to contributing in these areas, they increasingly did so with greater confidence.

Shifting Roles

Students as Agents. Sarah invited her students to move from viewing themselves as persons who were simply "acted upon" within a school setting towards seeing

themselves as actors within this second grade classroom. This significant shift in perception is connected with Maxine Greene's conception of freedom. Greene (1988) writes that "freedom is personally achieved when individuals make decisions they believe to be fully their own" (p. 101). Over time, Sarah brought attention to the notion that students were, indeed, acting to make their own decisions. Evan stated to Sarah one day in January after he had helped a younger child, "I'm having a good day today." Sarah described her conversation with him to me, *"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 looked at her and responded, "Yes, I guess I do now!" Evan's statement reflected his recognition that his present sense of "his day" was connected with choices he made in behavior and action. This statement to Sarah certainly reflected a marked change from the beginning of the school year, when he had told Sarah, "I'm bad. I've always been bad."

Other children also showed remarkable growth over time in their movement towards the sense of freedom that Greene describes, or what Mike Rose (1995) refers to as "agency," explaining that this occurs when "young people act as agents in their own development" (p. 416). Sereita and Erin, who were painfully shy at the beginning of the school year, both having experienced a great deal of academic failure throughout their school histories, acted with increasing confidence, competence and assertiveness as the year progressed.

I recall watching Erin read proudly to preschool children during the winter months and also observing her one day during the spring as she confidently assisted Anthony with difficult words while they read together. Erin's mother spoke frequently to Sarah about her daughter's growth, remarking in March that Erin now "loved school." I also observed that over the course of time, Erin spoke up more frequently during class discussions and was willing to let Sarah show off her artwork to the class group. When responding to the letter Mr. Dixon sent to parents, asking whether or not they wanted their children to "loop" with Sarah, Erin's mother wrote, "I feel that this is a GREAT idea!"

Sereita's mother also wrote at length on the looping response form about her enthusiasm for the plan, including this statement, "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." I remember, too, Sereita's growing comfortability and confidence in reading. As the year progressed, she frequently chose "Book Corner" during center time and claimed Sarah's rocking chair as her reading space, happily and intently working through available books until center time ended. I recall also an incident during the spring when Sereita took her turn as "Star of the Week" and announced to the class that, when she grew up, she wanted to be a teacher. Both Erin and Sereita were blossoming as confident, competent, assertive kids as the year progressed.

Other shifts were also apparent. Alton, who stared straight ahead and would not take his coat and hat off until lunch time during the fall months, was the child who ran down the hall to greet me and give me a hug one morning in April. Donald, who wandered around the room and did very little school work at the beginning of the year, audibly groaned in frustration one day in January when Sarah announced that independent reading time was over. Vincent, who did not consider himself to be a reader or a writer in September, beamed from ear to ear when he showed the class the football shape book he had constructed as an inquiry project during the Spring.

Almost all of Sarah's students chose to read books to preschool and kindergarten students on multiple occasions throughout the year, which enabled them to see themselves even further as knowledge bearers, capable of positions of authority. Heath and Mangiola (1991), who supervised a buddy reading program much like the one that Sarah organized for her students, write that assuming the role of "reader" can foster personal growth within the older child. They explain, "Though the goal of the project was not simply to make the tutors 'feel good' or to give them added self-confidence, their classroom teachers noticed a growth in their willingness to speak out in class and to take leadership roles" (p. 23). In a similar way, with increasing frequency Sarah's students took on jobs, helped peers, shared ideas and opinions during class discussions, and publicly shared their reading and writing efforts with the class as the year progressed. All of these evidences of growth reflected what Oyler (1996) refers to as "markers of shared authority" (p. 51).

<u>Sarah's Role: Bridging Students Toward Academic and Personal Growth</u>. The

growth experienced by Sarah's students was fueled by the many supports that Sarah provided. These supports included the frequent opportunities she offered that allowed the students to take on active roles, such as teaching, decision making, inquiry-based learning, and assuming jobs. Rief (1992) writes that students become articulate learners when they are given opportunities to "continually practice discussing what they know and how they know it" (p. 147). Sarah was committed to offering these types of opportunities to her students on a regular basis.

Sarah also modeled for her students how to read, write and research, by providing personal examples. Peterson (1994) notes the importance of modeling when he states, "Don't set kids up for failure . . . model what it means to work independently and in groups. Be clear about what is and isn't within the realm of student choices" (p. 34). Sarah's efforts to model for her students were extensive. To begin a rough draft writing session, Sarah turned on the overhead projector and demonstrated the writing of her own draft, such as the day when she asked the students to write about, "You'll never guess what happened over Spring Break . . . " On the following day, when all of the children had completed their rough drafts, Sarah once again displayed her model on the overhead projector and asked the children to provide her with revision input as she read through the piece aloud.

Sarah also modeled the process of doing inquiry-based research from start to finish. The children not only observed, but also took part in, Sarah's discussions of topic choices, how to develop inquiry questions, how to look for answers, how to compile answers into report form, and how to develop projects which display what has been learned. On occasion, the class worked through the inquiry process for a sample topic together; this occurred with the development of a group report on "Chinese Kites" in March. Goodman and Burke (1980) discuss these types of formal modeling sessions as "strategy lessons" which teachers can offer to support children as they learn how to progress through tasks such as reading informational materials, taking notes or writing about what they have learned.

In addition to this form of strategy modeling, Sarah integrated informal means of modeling into everyday routines. On some days, she read books of her own choice during

independent reading time, rather than listening to children read. When students wrote her letters or left messages for her on the class message board, she wrote them back. She talked to the children about books she was reading or things she was writing about at home. She also mentioned to children strategies that worked for her when she needed an outlet, for instance, telling Evan that drawing was helpful when she was frustrated, and presenting him with colored markers he could use for this purpose. Sarah consistently sought ways to make student successes possible. She told them about strategies they might try, and she physically showed them how the strategies looked through her own actions. As Delpit (1988) suggests, Sarah served as a type of "bridge" for her students, apprenticing them towards positive steps within their own learning process.

In addition, Sarah coached and nurtured children continually as they took risks, always considering, as Oyler (1996) writes, "which pieces (of classroom processes) can be done by which students and who needs more support and involvement from the teacher" (p. 35). As children developed inquiry questions, looked through resource materials, developed answers and wrote reports, Sarah served as source of support. Not only did she rotate through the group of children, checking on the progress of each one regularly, but she also devised a method for charting their work and determining which students needed extra help.

Sarah's use of the blackboard as a tracking system was interesting. She wrote on the board headings such as "Questions," "Answers," "Rough draft," "Editing," and "Typing." Each child's name was listed beneath the stage in which he or she was working. As a child finished a stage he or she erased his or her name and wrote it down under the next heading in the sequence. Sometimes Sarah required that the children must check their work through her, the student teacher or me before they could move on. Our responsibilities included not only making sure that students were ready to progress, but also suggesting resources, serving as a final editor, and helping students synthesize ideas from "answers" into report form. On other occasions, Sarah did not require children to check their work with a teacher, but left the possibility open as an option they could sign up for if they wanted to. At other times, Sarah asked that the children check their work with a peer. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) describe the importance of providing

children with support and assistance as they need it, without "taking over" the learning process for them:

> "In our concern to have students take greater responsibility for their own learning, therefore, it is important that we do not mistakenly hold back from providing assistance when this is needed. On the other hand, we need to ensure that, when we offer assistance, we do so in a manner that is contingently responsive to the learners' goals and to the meaning they are constructing, and supportive of their creative attempts to make new connections and find novel solutions to problems" (p. 48).

Over the course of the year, Sarah provided assistance in a very individualized fashion, differentiating means of support according to the needs of the student. In the winter, she was careful to caution me and the student teacher, *"don't do the work for them; they can do it,"* but rather to look for ways to nudge them towards finding ways to proceed through their tasks. Frequently, I observed Sarah verbally guiding students through a portion of their work, then watching and listening as the students worked through further stages of their work with less assistance, such as when Donald constructed a set of puppets or when Anthony created a mural during inquiry time.

Finally, Sarah maintained an emphasis upon all class members showing respect toward their peers throughout the year, making it clear that hurtful comments and actions were not acceptable within the classroom community. In this realm, Sarah asserted her own authority in a non-negotiable fashion, for the purpose of protecting the rights of her students. Thus, her classroom was not an entirely "free speech" situation; instead, speech and activity were invited as long as they did not violate another's right to the safe and accepting environment that Sarah wanted to provide for all children. In this respect, perhaps Sarah followed a premise that Oyler (1996) writes about, the belief that in some situations "an absence of teacher authority here would be considered as an abandonment" (p. 73). Subsequently, when Anthony remarked to Chip, "You white face, you ugly," Sarah maintained that his comment was not acceptable. When Vincent told Erin that she belonged in first grade because of her reading problems, Sarah intervened. Often, when a situation arose in which a child's feelings had been hurt, Sarah asked the offending child to answer the question, *"Were you treating them as you would like to be treated?"* Sarah's non-negotiable stance concerning unacceptable comments and actions towards

others provided all students the opportunity to contribute within a sense of safety and acceptance as a general rule, establishing what Wink (1997) refers to as, "a classroom in which students are safe to take risks" (p. 122).

It is evident that, while Sarah desired to share authority with her students in order to offer them opportunities to actively contribute as learners and citizens within the classroom community, there were also situations in which Sarah maintained an authoritative position. It was clear to me that Sarah did not abdicate her own authority in order to allow students to assume authoritative roles. Instead, Sarah used her authority for the purpose of supporting students as they moved towards participatory roles.

An assertion made by Paulo Freire (Shor and Freire, 1987) is related to Sarah's position. He writes that: "For me the question is not for the teacher to have less and less authority. The issue is that the democratic teacher never, never transforms authority into authoritarianism. He or she can never stop being an authority or having authority. Without authority it is very difficult for the liberties of the students to be shaped" (p. 91). Inherent to Freire's conception of authority is its intended purpose. He seems to suggest that a teacher's authority can be used to guide and support students as agents of action within their own learning processes. Authoritarianism, instead, relates to the idea of maintaining control over students; within an authoritarian classroom, there is no intention of moving students toward agency. Sergiovanni (1994) describes authoritarian approaches as referring to "unquestioned obedience to the person control," whereas authoritative approaches "require that those in 'authority' lead by reason, lead by teaching, and lead by relying on the substance of ideas rather than on raw power or on clever psychological manipulation" (p. 135). Sarah's actions and words emerged from an authoritative, not an authoritarian position.

The use of Sarah's authority was present as an underlying foundation in the classroom through the establishment and carrying out of non-negotiable elements such as the four classroom rules for behavior, as well as curricular focuses which met the second grade SOLs. Through constructing these foundations, Sarah assumed a responsibility for her classroom community that Oyler (1996) describes: "A teacher's job requires that she assume full responsibility for classroom process and students' learning - she must accept

her authority and use it to structure the classroom" (pp. 24-25). Yet Sarah told me that she considered these curricular and behavioral foundations to be broad parameters within which there existed a great deal of room for negotiation with students concerning both interpretation of and implementation of curriculum and classroom guidelines.

After introducing the four classroom rules to students, Sarah invited them to discuss what the class rules would "look like" in action. She also asked them to determine with her what might be the consequences of violating classroom rules, as well as the privileges that could be earned by class members who upheld the policies. Across the course of the year, when a student's behavior was in question, Sarah frequently asked that student to determine whether or not their actions were within the realm of the set standards, or to consider what should be done as a result of their actions. When disputes arose between peers, she often asked the children involved to move to the hall and *"work it out together."* Although Sarah introduced possibilities such as team cooperation points, Fun Friday and lunch time picnics, she invited students to negotiate factors such as how many personal points should be required in order to attend Fun Friday, what activities should be a part of Fun Friday, what friend they would like to share a picnic with, or whom they would like to have as team members.

Sarah's movement between source of authority and facilitator of student authority was characterized not only by opportunities for teacher and students to make curricular choices, but also by the degree to which Sarah invited students to speak as knowledgeable sources across class discussions and readings. Not only did Sarah share her expertise in these situations, but she also actively listened as students shared their own experiences and ideas. Celia Oyler (1996) speaks of this type of balance between student and teacher sharing within a classroom when she writes: "Part of what I am calling 'shared authority' (involves) adapting a teaching stance fraught with moment-to-moment decisions for teachers regarding when to step <u>in</u> and when to step <u>back</u>, when to speak as an expert and when to listen to students as they construct their own expertise, and when to direct and when to take up the suggestions of the students" (p. 4). Across daily classroom events, Sarah stepped in and stepped back regularly. She used her authority purposefully, towards the end hope that students might become increasingly more able to assume

positive, participatory roles within their own learning processes and as citizens within a mutually supportive classroom community.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOURCES AND PROCESSES OF SUPPORT FOR SARAH'S EVOLVING PRAXIS

Across the course of the school year, Sarah frequently talked to me about her evolving perceptions of what it meant for her class to grow, and through these discussions I began to develop my own understandings about why she did what she did in the classroom. Conversations that stand out in my mind are Sarah's explanations of why she provided Evan, Anthony or Christy with means of support that were different from what she offered to their classmates, or why she sensed the need to hold class meetings to discuss concepts such as team cooperation, use of class time and the idea of trust, or why she decided not to intervene when students such as Donald and Alton were considering whether or not to abide by class guidelines, but instead allowed them to determine their words and actions without her prompting. It was interesting to me that Sarah's beliefs about what would best meet the needs of her students were not at all static, but rather, constantly evolving.

Likewise, her classroom practices evolved over the course of time. She began the year by introducing class discussions as a means of working through behavioral problems, but soon perceived that the kids needed *"more structure."* As a result, she added the use of four basic rules and a supportive behavior management system. As the year concluded, however, dependence on the management system had decreased significantly, while the use of class discussions had been maintained. In a similar fashion, Alton and Evan were under "contract" systems in the fall months, but not during the spring. I believe that Sarah held definite goals for her students; she hoped that they might grow as positive contributors within the classroom community. Blumer (1992) writes about what it means to move students towards this type of goal: "Change can only be achieved through (a teacher's) acceptance of responsibility to further their goals through words and actions" (p. 1). It was apparent to me that Sarah took this responsibility seriously. Not only did her beliefs about what might foster student growth continually evolve, but her classroom practices evolved as well.

Roche (1996) writes that acting in democratic ways within a classroom involves both reflection and action; he states, "reflection grows out of action, and action grows out of reflection" (p. 38). Sarah's practices were certainly shaped by her reflections, and her reflections were often shaped by what she learned through acting and observing the actions of her students. In this sense, her praxis as a teacher was evolving. Wink (1997) describes praxis as "the constant reciprocity of our theory and practice . . . theory building and critical reflection inform our practice and our practice and action inform our theory building and critical reflection" (p. 48). Sarah's praxis reflected who she was, which incorporated both what she believed and how she carried out her beliefs on a day by day, moment by moment level. As an observer, I noticed a continuing quality of "reflective experimentation" that was represented in both the invitations Sarah offered to students and the supports she provided for them.

The evolution of Sarah's praxis was a reciprocal process. As students, colleagues and social/cultural factors impacted Sarah's beliefs about how to work with her students, she reflected upon their impact. From this reflective process, Sarah drew ideas, encouragement and energy, and her further actions amongst students and colleagues were shaped. Maxine Greene (1988) explains that no person's growing understandings ever occur in a vacuum, but that instead, they must be considered within a matrix of social, economic, cultural and psychological conditions (p. 80). On several occasions, Sarah suggested to me that many persons significantly impacted her work. At my request, she constructed a "context web," and explained that it reflected how she placed herself, at that time, amongst persons from whom she drew support for her work. (See Appendix F for Context Web).

The Impact of Sarah's Students Upon Her Praxis

When I initially examined Sarah's context web, I was not surprised to find her colleagues, building principal and university contacts labeled as having a high degree of supportive impact upon her work. I was quite surprised, however, when I noticed that Sarah had designated her students as an even higher level of support. Perhaps because I was aware of daily, unpredictable challenges that the students presented to Sarah, I

assumed that she might place them as more of a responsibility than a support. Yet when I questioned her about the web, she emphasized to me that this positioning of her students as top supporters was intentional; she explained, *"Don't forget them. That's very important."*

After Sarah introduced this idea to me, I found several other references to the idea of students supporting their teachers within classrooms where a sense of democratic community is a focus. I have come to believe that within these types of contexts, this connection is not only relevant, but also essential. Teacher Steve Gilbert stated to Mike Rose (1995), "When you teach, the young people with whom you work are, in a profound sense, your co-workers, your colleagues. They become very important to you. A number of students I've taught are extraordinary people. You'd be lucky to have one of them as your child" (p. 182). His statement suggests that his students contribute a great deal to his work with them, many doing so because of who they are as human beings; he obviously values what they add within the classroom community. Wink (1997) writes about the impact that students have personally had upon her growing understandings as a teacher: "I went into teaching thinking, 'I will teach; they will learn.' It seemed so simple. It was not. They taught me that teaching is learning" (p. xxi). Others write about the reciprocal nature of learning between teacher and students. Coles (1997) states, "That is what our children can offer us, and what we can offer them: a chance to learn from them, even as we try to teach them" (p. 8). Katie Poduska (1996) asserts, "That I change as my students change is an incontrovertible fact, and says much about what I think teaching essentially is" (p. 106). Joni Garlock (1996) writes, "One of the most important aspects of teaching is realizing that you do not know everything. Allow your students to teach you . . . let them help you become a better teacher and a better human being" (p. 69). Across these statements runs the idea that a teacher's praxis, including both her beliefs about and her actions amongst students, is impacted not only by reflecting on personal ideas and initiatives, but also by considering what can be learned from students. Sarah viewed the actions and words of her students as starting points for her reflections.

After observing Sarah for the course of a school year, I perceived that the evolution within her classroom followed a specific, ongoing progression. It began with

how she committed herself to seeing the good, the possible, the potential in her students, rather than writing them off based upon their presenting behaviors or the warnings of former teachers. Having envisioned the good, Sarah expressed to the children what she believed about them. She then provided them with opportunities through which they could share who they were with others. Sometimes the students' contributions were positive, such as Alton's drawings, Meredith's teaching, and Evan's leadership. These contributions energized both Sarah and the children, and they led Sarah to offer further invitations for students to contribute. Sometimes though, particularly at the beginning of the school year, students' contributions were distressing. When Sarah asked Alton to make a choice concerning group participation, he ripped the class chart and disrupted reading time. When given the opportunity to use the school mail delivery system, Evan sent a message that was defined by Sarah simply as "horrible." When returning from reading to preschool children, Anthony raced through the hall and disrupted several other classrooms. By living through these incidents, Sarah determined that her students needed not only opportunities to contribute, but also classroom structures that would support and encourage positive behavioral choices and provide consequences for disruptive or disrespectful choices. Subsequently, she acted upon what she had learned by implementing structures such as the four classroom rules, listening coupons, the team cooperation chart, and Fun Friday.

It felt like a great deal of time passed before incidents of cruelty or disruption decreased significantly amongst Sarah's students, and I believe that the months during which the transition was taking place were considerably wearing upon Sarah. Yet she persisted in her verbal message to me and to others: *"These kids are great kids; they have so much to offer."* And she continued to offer opportunities for them to contribute within the classroom, dealing with disruptive behaviors as she sensed the need to. As the spring months arrived, I was impressed by the degree to which positive student contributions flourished. This flourishing seemed to serve as a sort of energizer to Sarah. She became visibly excited and literally beamed with enthusiasm when her kids showed evidence of their growth - as self-confident persons, as contributors to class learning, or as citizens of a respectful community. I can visualize the expression on her face when the cafeteria

worker praised their good citizenship at lunch one day or when the guidance counselor commented on how well behaved they were; I can hear Sarah telling them, *"I knew all along that you could be wonderful, and you were!"* I remember how she applauded and praised when quiet children such as Brandon shared their inquiry projects with pride. I can hear her describing to Alton how much she loved the drawings that he had prepared for several of his classmates. I believe that a core part of Sarah's praxis as a teacher involved doing what Maxine Greene (1988) refers to as trying to "reawaken the consciousness of possibility" amongst students (pp. 22-23). For these students, perhaps this sense of possibility was a reawakening, or even an initial awakening, that they were valued members within a learning community.

The Impact of Cultural Expectations Upon Sarah's Praxis

Another important element that shaped Sarah's praxis was her focus upon not only opportunities for students to see themselves as valued contributors within this immediate learning community, but also her growing understanding of what it would take for these students to obtain the knowledge and skills that would be required of them for success in the dominant culture which they would one day become adult citizens within. In this sense, Sarah's awareness of cultural expectations particularly impacted her reflections regarding how to prepare her students academically.

Sarah spoke to me on several occasions of the work of educator Lisa Delpit (1988), who holds that social and economic oppression will not end for students unless they are able to read, write, calculate, research, speak and think in ways that will help them give them entry into a "culture of power" that may be less than willing to admit them. Celia Oyler (1996) asserts that "along with the knowledge that students sometimes have the power to act and initiate must also be knowledge of the standard forms used by those gatekeeper positions in our society" (p. 28). Apple and Beane (1995) state that, "A democratic curriculum seeks to help students become knowledgeable and skilled in many ways, including those required by the gatekeepers of socioeconomic access. In short, democratic education lives with a constant tension of seeking a more significant education for young people while still attending to the knowledge and skills expected by

powerful educational forces whose interests are anything but democratic" (p. 17).

Sarah worried about the academic progress of her kids. In January she confided to me that she realized that much time during the fall months had been devoted to establishing a sense of community amongst her students, but that during the spring months she hoped to build upon this foundation with a heavier emphasis on the *"academic side."* She told me, *"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 . . . 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."*

Not only did Sarah focus hard upon reading and writing growth during the winter and spring months, but she and Kelly together spent a great deal of time and money developing the Social Studies, Science and Math curricula that corresponded with the Virginia Standards of Learning (1995) for second grade. I was amazed by the degree of active learning that they were able to invite through the participatory learning experiences that they planned and implemented, such as conducting science experiments, constructing China inquiry projects, and teaching estimation and base ten in Math through use of small bags of plastic counters, jelly beans and other materials. Were the Virginia Standards of Learning (1995) "covered?" Definitely so. Were they covered through the use of textbooks? Rarely. I observed that while Sarah was committed to providing her students with all of the essential knowledge and skills that would be required of them in standardized test situations, her methods for conveying these essentials were derived from her understandings of how the children seemed to learn best.

Although Sarah explained to me that the required *"standardized testing does not match well with their need for an experiential base,"* she did make efforts to prepare her students for this experience. An example that stands out is the incident at the end of February when Sarah instructed her students in "test behavior" in preparation for a Math test. She told 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."* I remember thinking that this situation stood out as strikingly different from the usual open discussion and active participation that Sarah invited from her students. Yet Sarah believed that her students

needed to know how to successfully manage a test-taking situation, as they would be required to do during the upcoming standardized testing. Paley (1995) writes that children are capable of perceiving differing expectations that are relevant to various contexts and situations and of learning to act accordingly (p. 41). Sarah introduced her children to this concept by explaining the contextual expectations related to test-taking and by holding them to these expectations in related situations. Although Sarah mentioned to me on several occasions that she had serious concerns about the standardized testing system, she also actively displayed a respect for Delpit's assertion to Barbara Miner (1995) that, "As long as the tests are used to exclude certain groups of people, it's important to give those students access to test-taking strategies" (p. 143).

In addition to preparing her students for test-taking situations, Sarah made it clear to them that she would use her authority directly and consistently as it related to their participation in learning activities and completion of school work. She told her students, *"Learning is not an option. Learning is your job."* Subsequently, if students made the choice to play during a learning activity, Sarah required them to complete the activity during Center time later that day. For a few weeks, Sarah used a kitchen timer on occasions when she asked the children to transition between activities, such as moving from writing journal entries at their desks to joining the group on the rug for reading time. If children did not join in the new activity by the point that the timer rang, they later made up this missed activity time during Centers as well. She described to the students her reason for implementing this process: *"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."*

Sarah verbalized explicitly to her students that there were times and places in which she would assert her authority for what she considered to be their benefit; not to control them, but rather, to guide them towards becoming responsible, caring, active members of a learning community. Their responsibilities as members were not only to respect and act with kindness toward others within the group, but also to manage all learning tasks responsibly. As Sarah perceived that her students needed support towards assuming these responsibilities, she provided them with elements such as consequences,

guidance, resources and encouragement.

As an observer, I never ceased to be amazed by the degree to which Sarah poured herself into her classroom. She literally spent herself, physically and emotionally, on many days. I remember sitting in the children's chairs with her on several occasions after school feeling completely drained myself, and wondering how Sarah would manage to find the energy to prepare class materials for the next day before she left the building. I learned that she frequently stayed until 6:00 P.M. for this purpose. In addition, she and her husband, David, often shopped for teaching items such as manipulatives, experiment kits, and art supplies during weekends or searched bookstores and libraries for materials that might supplement the curriculum. Sarah's commitment to her students' growth as academic learners was extensive. Her praxis as a teacher was certainly shaped by her growing vision of what these children needed in order to succeed academically not just within her classroom, but also after they had left her.

The Impact of the Eastside Community Upon Sarah's Praxis

Mixed Receptivity. Of the building context at Eastside, Sarah described that receptivity was "mixed" towards the teaching beliefs and strategies that she and Kelly were trying to practice. There were several teachers, including a new teacher working in the TAG program, a third grade teacher, and a preschool teacher, who frequently spoke in favor of ideas presented by Sarah or Kelly in faculty meetings, or who talked with them at length about their own work with children and how they might like to learn more about the use of inquiry-based learning or positive approaches to classroom management. Then there were many teachers at Eastside who did not make comments one way or the other concerning Sarah's practices, at least to her knowledge. There were a few, however, who openly criticized the ways in which Sarah and Kelly were working with their students. One teacher was quick to blame Sarah's students for destruction in the boys' hallway bathroom, even though there was little or no evidence available concerning whom might have caused the damage. Later, although students within this teacher's classroom admitted to creating the problem, she never apologized to Sarah or her children for falsely accusing them. On another occasion, a fellow second grade teacher told a child that the

class work Sarah and Kelly required was for "babies." When the child relayed this judgment to Kelly and Sarah, they were both quite upset, particularly because they had attempted to build bridges between themselves and this teacher by loaning her materials and providing her with lesson plans during the China unit which all four second grade classes at Eastside had participated in. Interestingly, a teacher whom Mike Rose (1995) writes about, Sarah Howard, experienced a similar episode. Rose writes about this incident: "There were teachers who referred to Sarah Howard and company as the Seven Dwarfs and the Brat Pack . . . this sort of internal bickering is a common development in school reform efforts" (p. 172). Shortly after the "babies" incident, Sarah admitted to me that she remained angry at the teacher. Although she and Kelly continued with the same type of teaching approach that the teacher had criticized, their relationship with this teacher had been seriously compromised, perhaps permanently.

Cunat (1996) speaks to a potential problem amongst educators who seek to provide their students with opportunities to take an active role in their learning. She asserts that to trust students as capable of working with you to shape their own learning experiences can be considered risky and unprofessional . . . and to be considered "unprofessional" is a real teacher fear . . . it means not conforming to some form of institutional expectation (p. 138). Sarah faced sour remarks and accusations from other teachers fairly often, particularly at the beginning of the school year. It was rare that she got through a week, or even a day, when one of the children's special area teachers did not make a comment concerning the misbehavior of one or more of the children. Both the librarian and music teacher frequently sent children back to Sarah for misbehaving during special area time. In the Fall, the guidance counselor remarked that they were "the worst group she had ever worked with." Did Sarah take these comments to be personal attacks on her competence as a teacher? I believe that she did feel the sting of these remarks personally, but that she tried very hard not to convey these feelings to the children. She did, however, take time out to talk to her children about "kind, caring behavior" on several occasions just before library or music time. In addition, there were a number of days during which Sarah physically sat in on various special area times, advising students that she would be monitoring their behaviors even though the special area teacher was in

charge. She also made it clear to her students that they were responsible for good behaviors when under the charge of other teachers, even if these teachers taught "differently" than they were used to. She explained to them, "*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."* Sergiovanni (1994) writes that teaching for change is "always tough, because of the strong connection between doing and affirmation" (p. 1). Sarah certainly did not regularly receive affirmation from several of her colleagues, although later in the school year I noticed that positive comments came more frequently. One day in February, the guidance counselor told Sarah, "Your class was really good today!" This statement stood out in stark contrast to her evaluation at the beginning of the year. In addition, the physical education teacher, whom Sarah had begun to work with on the school's discipline committee, began to take notice of and make public comment about the positive behaviors that she saw displayed by Sarah's students. Sarah explained to me that she believed an emphasis on positive behaviors was directly connected to her students' growth. She commented, *"They're not going to learn if we don't think they can learn. And they won't behave if we don't think they can behave."*

Although Sarah did receive criticism, which she reported as upsetting, I noticed that during our conversations Sarah's consideration of this negativity was not her primary focus when I asked about her experience amongst others at Eastside. Sarah made it clear to me that she did not feel isolated in her work at Eastside, primarily because two supportive individuals were particularly vital to her continuing efforts: 1) John Dixon, her building principal; and 2) Kelly Ainsworth, her second grade teaching colleague. Sarah told me, *"If I didn't have John and Kelly, I don't know if I would continue . . . because there are so many other teachers who think what we're doing is wrong."*

<u>Shared Values</u>. Examining the role that John Dixon took on across Sarah's praxis is essential to understanding her evolution as a teacher. Goodman (1992) writes that, "One cannot adequately examine democratic schooling for children and at the same time ignore the power relationships between the teachers and administration. The dynamics of power and participation found among the adults that work within a given school reflect underlying values which in turn have an impact on the children who spend much of their

time among these people" (p. 63). Having talked to Sarah about her work with John, as well as having observed his presence across the school building, I was convinced that the underlying values which John espoused and practiced did, very much, have an impact upon Sarah's students. Sarah emphatically stated to me, on several occasions, that she believed that John's philosophies about teaching and learning, and his ideas for working with children, were closely aligned with her own. She expressed that, because of the common beliefs that they held, she perceived John as both understanding of the growth that she hoped for her kids, and willing to provide her with the support she needed in order to move towards that growth. Sarah spoke of her appreciation for John's beliefs and actions:

> *"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."*

In an interview towards the end of the school year, I asked John if he might talk with me about his personal beliefs concerning teaching and learning, and he agreed to do so. In our conversation he expressed his belief in the potential good within each child, *"I think that all of the kids we have want to do things that are going to be pleasing for adults and themselves. Kids want to do that, given the opportunity."* He also described his perception of the teacher's role in positively guiding their students: *"It requires, on the part of the teacher, a lot of time and effort and thinking . . . about what it means to provide the opportunities that kids need in order to succeed."* He also mentioned that he held strongly to many of the ideas presented in Boyer's The Basic School, (1995) a book which he had recommended to the Eastside faculty for their reading and consideration. Boyer's work recommends that a school should be committed to promoting seven core virtues amongst its members, including honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance, and giving (pp. 183-185). Ayers (1993) writes that "good

schools tend to be organized around and powered by a set of core values," (p. 134). Following my conversation with John, I gauged that the core virtues mentioned by Boyer were the "values" which drove his practice as an administrator, and which he hoped might become organizing foundations behind the practices of the Eastside community.

Given what I had observed concerning Sarah's beliefs and practices, it was clear that her assertions about their common philosophies were well founded. Both Sarah and John seemed to be focused upon nurturing virtues such as respect, responsibility and compassion amongst the community members with whom they worked directly. I believe that the type of "community" both were actively seeking to build was similar to what Sergiovanni (1994) refers to as "community of mind." Sergiovanni explains that when a community of mind emerges, "the school becomes a place where people care for each other, help each other, devote themselves to their work, and commit themselves to a life of inquiry and learning. These ideas are central to community. They represent a norm system, and when members internalize this norm system they feel obligated to embody these ideals in their everyday lives. Motivation comes from the inside" (p. 198).

Contemplating the basis from which John Dixon lived out his daily work as building principal greatly helped me understand how Sarah was able to continue to believe and act as she did. I knew that Sarah received negative feedback from other teachers regularly concerning how difficult her children were. If she were to express to many of her colleagues her hope that this group of twelve children, all members of lower socioeconomic groups, many who had been noted as "behavior problems" and several who had significant special academic needs, might grow together towards the "community of mind" that Sergiovanni (1994) writes of, I believe that they would have either argued with her, laughed, or thought her to be either unrealistic or crazy. Sarah sensed this; she was not blind to the realization that her work at Eastside was what many might consider to be teaching against the grain. Yet Ayers (1993) holds that "teaching against the grain can best be accomplished with allies" (p. 131). John Dixon was a consistently committed ally across the course of Sarah's work, as was Kelly Ainsworth. Sarah regularly sought out both, for conversations that ranged from idea sharing, to problem solving, to seeking a shoulder to cry on. John seemed to recognize that both

Sarah and Kelly would need support in their efforts to move kids towards positive growth as community members. As a result of this perceived need, he not only provided both teachers with personal support, but he also strategically placed them at Eastside in a location which enabled them to best support one another.

Collaborative Relationship. When John hired Sarah and Kelly in the summer preceding their beginning work at Eastside, he purposefully placed them at the same grade level, in classrooms which were physically adjacent. Sarah commented to me concerning this placement: *"John was so smart to put us together. It just makes a world of difference."* Not only were Sarah and Kelly able to plan curriculum together, such as the Native American, China and Egypt units and their Science experiments, but they also adjoined the class groups for a variety of purposes. Known to one another's classes as "the cousins," the children within Sarah's and Kelly's classes cross-grouped for inquiry projects and Fun Friday activities. The two teachers also implemented similar classroom management systems, to work towards providing students with consistent expectations when they switched rooms.

I enjoyed watching Sarah and Kelly work together. Never once did I observe an instance in which one requested support of the other and the other did not provide it. On several occasions during my observations in Sarah's classroom, one of Kelly's students showed up at the door with a note from Kelly, asking Sarah if she might borrow a specific book or teaching aid. Sarah always took time out, then and there, to locate the item and send it to Kelly. On other days, Sarah sent messengers to Kelly's room, sometimes asking if Inquiry or Fun Friday time could be shifted, or if a particular student might be able to sit in Kelly's room for a "cool down" period. Kelly consistently helped Sarah with each request. In addition, each teacher actively sought ways to encourage the other. I remember an occasion when Sarah seemed discouraged about how things were going. She told me later that her spirits lifted when she called Kelly that evening and *"talked for an hour."* She described her feelings after the phone call, *"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."* The next day I noticed a potted plant on Kelly's desk that Sarah had brought

in to thank her for the encouragement. On many days, Sarah and Kelly began their mornings by visiting one another's classrooms and talking about their lesson plans. At lunch Sarah, Kelly and I ate as a group in Sarah's room, sometimes at desks, and other times in the rug area with "picnicking" children. After school, Sarah almost always spent time talking with Kelly about the events of the day, or even conversing about their lives outside of Eastside. In one of our interview discussions, Sarah explained, *"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?'"* On occasion, they talked about plans they had made to shop or eat out together in the evening.

I perceived that Sarah's work with Kelly could be characterized as much more than merely a collegial working relationship. I realized that the foundation beneath their work together was their friendship, a friendship that had been forged in graduate school, during which both had recognized that the other shared similar purposes for working with students. At the beginning of the year, Sarah described for me how much it meant to know that Kelly would be working with her:

> *"It's very comforting to have Kelly here . . . thinking about doing this 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 in a different direction totally. Having someone who understands that and is trying to do the same thing herself, to change in that same direction . . . 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 that."*

When I asked Kelly to describe her work with Sarah, her response was similar:

> "It's like working with my best friend . . . we have the same ideas as far as, like with inquiry and with our expectations of them, what we'd like to see them be able to do . . . and there's a lot of sharing and a lot of support going on, (during) the bad days or the good days or whatever that may be. She'll boost me up, and she's a good model . . . it would be a totally different experience this year if she wasn't here."

Through their relationship, I believe that Sarah and Kelly were able to overcome the obstacle of teacher isolation, an obstacle that has been identified by some educators as having a negative impact upon their teaching. First and Gray (1991) write, "Most teachers experience the balance of the school day alone in their classroom with minimal

professional contact with other adults and little opportunity for interaction with peers to share strategies or observe others in action" (p. 253). Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997) state that when teachers wish to attempt new approaches within their classrooms, "they need encouragement regularly," adding that when teachers meet frequently for the purpose of support, "they end their isolation, encourage each other, work better with students, and are more successful in the classroom" (p. 187). Although there were certainly many occasions on any given day during which both Sarah and Kelly worked alone with their students, it was also quite apparent that these teachers actively sought out ways to work together, whether in curriculum planning, teaching together, or conversing frequently, both during and outside of the school day. By alleviating a sense of isolation to as great a degree as they did, the classroom work of both teachers was supported.

Consistent Support. In addition to the positive impact that Kelly's support had upon Sarah's work with her students, I believe that Sarah's classroom work was also supported by the fact that her class size was quite small. Sarah told me that it was John who had enabled her to work with a class of twelve to thirteen students. During the first week of school, when building principals in Valley City were asked to consider their class enrollment numbers and make teaching assignment adjustments to ensure relatively balanced group sizes, John was determined not to sort out Sarah's students amongst the other second grade classrooms and move her elsewhere, even though Sarah's class size was quite small for her grade level. John maintained that the personalities and needs within her classroom necessitated the small class size, and thus, fully supported the sustenance of the class as a group in his recommendations to the school division's central office. Other studies have shown the significant impact that reduced class size can have upon children, particularly those from low-income families or with special needs. Toch and Streisand (1997), who discuss the Project STAR program in Tennessee, write that students who had been placed in groups with 13 to 17 students "had higher test scores, paid closer attention, asked more questions and had fewer discipline problems" than students in larger groups (p. 25). These authors also report on a study of class size implemented in Santa Monica, California that concluded, "smaller classes benefit students from low-income families most, middle-class kids less, and those from upper-

income backgrounds least of all" (p. 28). In his text, Mike Rose (1995) reports that a talented teacher of young children was asked, "What in education would you change if you could?" The teacher remarked that an item high on her list would be the reduction of class size, noting that children benefit most when the teacher has the time to develop a relationship with each one that allows him or her to see that child's strengths and needs specifically. She added, "Especially with kids with disabilities . . . you have to have that time to spend with them" (p. 356). The small number of children in Sarah's classroom supported her ability to get to know each one well and also allowed each child many opportunities to participate in class discussions and activities.

I believe it was significant that Sarah perceived John to be not only an administrator who believed much like she did and supported her work through strategic planning, such as locating her near Kelly and keeping her enrollment numbers low, but also someone with whom she felt comfortable talking about her day to day work with her children. Sarah frequently went to see John concerning how things were going within her classroom. It was John who gave her guidance when she consulted him expressing her frustration about the behavioral point system she had introduced, explaining, *"I want to be student centered, but look right here* (on the list of student-centered classroom characteristics that John had distributed) *it says 'no management system' . . . if you are truly student-centered you do not have rules and a discipline program with points or anything like that . . . I have one. I just put one up. How do I do it? I want to be student centered, so* (the point system) *is wrong, obviously."* John provided her with support and insight, explaining, "If (the students) 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." Following their conversation, Sarah continued with the classroom point system. When Sarah noticed that her students seemed to depend upon the "system" less and less, particularly in the Spring, she was excited. In this situation, John's counsel directly impacted both Sarah's beliefs and her practices with her children. Her praxis evolved. Elementary teacher Noelle Hawk Jaddaoui (1996) writes about her building principal in a

fashion that closely describes the type of support for praxis that I believe John provided for Sarah, "He had endless faith in my ability to learn and grow, but he also kept insisting that I be more patient with myself, telling me, 'Rome wasn't built in a day, Noelle.' His faith, patience and encouragement kept me from self-destructing during the crucial first year and has helped me become the confident risk-taker that I am and will continue to be" (p. 85).

Sarah also consulted with John when she perceived that specific children within her classroom might benefit from his involvement in their growth. When students such as Alton, Donald and Evan had difficulties in class, Sarah asked John if he might allow the children to sit in his office for a morning, or if he might talk with them. John consistently met her requests for support of individual students; in addition, he frequently visited Sarah's classroom for the purpose of checking on students such as these boys, often within a day or so following their stays in office.

The situation that stands out in my mind as representative of John's work with Sarah's kids was his consistent support of Alton across the course of the year. Throughout Alton's hitting episodes, verbal explosions, and subsequent temporary suspensions from school during the fall months, Sarah turned to John. Of his response, she told me, *"John was right there. Each time he was right behind me. He kept saying to Alton and his mother, 'He may not be here if he hurts; he may not be here."* When Alton sobbed one morning at the prospect of being sent home, John told him, *"I'm glad you like the classroom, but as long as you hit you cannot be here. If you want to stay here you have to stop hitting."* As the year progressed and Alton's physical outbursts occurred less frequently, John's connection to Alton did not diminish. When Alton refused to participate in class during November, John walked him to the office and found a quiet room for him to sit in, explaining to Alton, *"I want you to think awhile, calm down. I'll be right next door."* In February, after Alton chose not to retaliate when another child hit him in the cafeteria, he asked Sarah if he might go see Mr. Dixon right away, and she allowed him to do so. Following his conversation with Alton, John visited the classroom and announced publicly, "I want to compliment Alton for how he handled the incident at lunch today." During the school's end-of-the-year picnic, when another teacher claimed

that Alton had started a fight with one of her students, John asked Alton to tag along with him for a while so that they could talk about what had happened. Interestingly, Sarah and John learned later that Alton had not been the instigator of the fight. The final image that stands out in my mind concerning John Dixon's relationship with Alton took place at the very end of that last day of school. When Alton boarded his bus to go home, he seemed noticeably agitated. John decided to ride the bus home with Alton and the other riders in the group; I assumed that he did so in order to help Alton regain his composure.

John's relationship with Alton, as well as many others in Sarah's classroom, represents to me the powerful way in which he conveyed the core values which he hoped to move the Eastside community towards. Through John's work with Sarah and her students, he not only verbalized core values such as respect, responsibility, perseverance and giving, but he physically lived them out. His leadership style aligns closely with a way of working with teachers and students that Lieberman, Falk and Alexander (1995) write about in their description of how a school leader can embody "community" beliefs through action: "I try to empower people, have a calming effect, model decency and help people listen to one another" (p. 124). I believe that John's leadership practices conveyed to students and teachers that their membership within the Eastside community meant not only that they had the right to a safe, caring school environment, but also that they as members were responsible for building that environment for one another. His daily actions conveyed to them how they might carry out that responsibility. With the support of John and Kelly, Sarah actively engaged in this responsibility on a daily basis.

The Impact of Connections Beyond Eastside Upon Sarah's Praxis

Support from University Connections. Sarah talked about her students, John and Kelly far more than she mentioned persons outside of the Eastside Community as having an impact upon her work. There were occasions, however, on which she spoke of ways in which several others supported her. During the summer preceding the school year, Sarah spoke a great deal of her graduate work at the university. It was there that she had become familiar with works such as Paley's Kwanzaa and Me (1995) and You Can't Say You Can't Play (1992) and Ayers' To Teach (1993). Sarah frequently discussed themes

that emerged from these books as central considerations that she wanted to keep continually in front of her as she re-entered the teaching profession. In our summer conversations, she talked to me specifically about *"building a sense of community," "becoming more student-directed," "having a free inquiry period,"* and *"having class talks about how to work together."* She explained that she had considered each of these ideas as a result of graduate readings and added that, *"While I was reading I thought, 'I need to get back in there and try some of these things."*

Sarah mentioned that one class in particular, which she had taken during her final semester of studies, had tremendously impacted her considerations about teaching. The class group had been small, and the university professor who instructed the course, Dr. Pedroso, had invited the students to engage in a great deal of discussion, considering the work of educators such as Ayers, Delpit and Rose, and how their ideas might connect with real teaching in real classrooms. In an interview with Dr. Pedroso, she described for me her impression of Sarah's involvement in that experience, "She seemed to take the ideas of the class very, very seriously, as if she wasn't playing the game of school, but rather that she was using the ideas to think about her own work as a teacher." Dr. Pedroso also mentioned to me that she had been impressed by the growing connection that she had perceived between Sarah and Kelly, who was also a member of the course group: "I think their professional friendship developed strongly in the class . . . and one of the things they announced in class to me was that they wanted to teach together, that it would be wonderful if they could teach together . . . I thought, if they found a job together, they would probably help each other to do democratic kinds of things, that is to say, share decision making and authority in the classroom with the children."

Across the work of the course, Dr. Pedroso had invited class members to engage in a research study concerning the classroom dynamics that each member had experienced. Both Kelly and Sarah volunteered to participate in the study, completing interviews with a graduate student researcher for this purpose. When the year concluded, and Sarah and Kelly actually did find teaching positions within the same school, Dr. Pedroso invited them to continue with her in analyzing the research work. Again, both agreed. Dr. Pedroso talked with me about the collaborative work that they did together

over the course of the fall months, "The co-researcher and I invited Sarah and Kelly to do an analysis with us, and they were very enthusiastic and positive. They didn't say, 'Oh, we're too tired, or we're too busy.' They said, 'Yes, we would love to.' And they did the analysis, and we wrote a paper, and we presented at a research conference."

Additionally, Sarah was willing to allow me to research her work with students. Because our connecting link was Dr. Pedroso, Sarah considered me amongst her network of university connections. Across the course of my fieldwork in her classroom, she and I mutually supported each others' work. Sarah supported me by allowing me the opportunity to learn from and with her as a participant observer. I supported her by offering myself as an "extra teacher," extending Sarah's purposes of interacting with many children across workshops, inquiry times and other varied individualized and small group learning situations.

Since my fieldwork has concluded, Sarah and I have kept in contact as members of a mutual group of six women educators, connected by our links at the university. Dr. Pedroso, Sarah, Kelly, Rebecca Matthews (another Valley City Schools teacher), Anita Taylor (a doctoral student) and I have met regularly across the course of the 1997/98 school year, toward the preparation of a paper, accepted for presentation at a spring research conference. The focus of our work together has been the impact of our collaborative relationships upon our teaching purposes.

Through maintaining her connections with individuals from the university, Sarah has tapped into a network of support amongst others who share similar beliefs about teaching and learning. I believe that it was for this reason that she placed "university contacts" at a level of support which was parallel to that of John and Kelly. Rose (1995) writes that this type of supportive network can "reinforce and revitalize a belief held in some way . . . a belief in the value of (a teacher's) work" (p. 422). His statement reminds me of Dr. Pedroso's perception of her connection with Sarah, "My connection right now is that I see myself as a member of a growing network of teachers concerned about issues of equity and democracy and concerned about the life chances of people and trying to reach certain opportunities." She considers Sarah to be a dedicated, contributing member of that network of teachers. Sarah's continuing connections with this network have

supported her evolving understandings about what it meant to move towards a sense of democratic community with her students. She explained to me, *"I think both Kelly and I have tried to bring that same democracy that Dr. Pedroso used with us to our classroom.*"

Support from Family and Friends. Beyond the level of support that Sarah received from the university network that she was a part of, she identified for me an outer layer of support persons which included her parents, her immediate family and outside professional associations. From these groups, there were three individuals whom she talked about more often than others: 1) her mother; 2) her teaching, friend Anne Martin; and 3) her husband. Each of these people provided her with both professional and personal support. Rose (1995) writes that many teachers tap into relationships such as these for purposes such as "enriching their teaching, gaining emotional and intellectual support, and shoring up their ability to temper or challenge constraints" (p. 421).

During the fall months when both Alton and Evan were prone to explosive physical and verbal outbursts, Sarah strategically turned to both Anne Martin, and her mother, Mary Linden, for guidance concerning how to set up individual behavioral contracts for the two boys. She described to me what she asked of each person:

> *"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 her 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?'"*

Sarah spoke of her conversations with both Anne and her mother as having had an impact upon her development as a teacher not only at the present time, but also historically. She and Anne had gotten to know one another fourteen years earlier, when Sarah had taught Anne's son as a fourth grader. They had remained friends since. Sarah described their relationship: *"The nice thing about having a good friend that's a teacher is that we often will get together and just talk about teaching."* When I asked Anne to express how she believed she may have impacted Sarah's work as a teacher, she told me

simply, "We're very close friends . . . and we spend hours talking about our classes."

Sarah also talked frequently with her mother about her teaching beliefs and practices. There were many Mondays when she would mention to me a *"long talk"* that she and her mother had had over the weekend. Not only had Sarah talked with her mother about the behavioral contracts, but she also consulted her about her work amongst colleagues, her classroom management system, and the needs of individual children. I spoke with Mrs. Linden about their ongoing conversations about teaching, and she explained, "We've talked a good deal recently about behavior management strategies because she has run into some major unique needs of her current students . . . I've gotten to know some of the kids in her class by name . . . When she was in graduate school, we frequently talked about projects that she had or papers she was working on, or an idea for a piece of research." She added, "We have horrendous phone bills!"

Through both of these trusted relationships, Sarah found sources to which she could turn at almost any time to talk about her work with her students. Elementary teacher, Stephanie Terry, expressed to Mike Rose (1995) that support from fellow educators, even if they are not colleagues within an immediate situation, can make a significant difference as a teacher seeks to take risks and move towards what they believe in with students. She adds that with the support of these individuals, "I just have the sense that I'm not out there struggling alone" (p. 134).

A final individual that provided significant support for Sarah's praxis was her husband, David Rhea. Sarah spoke frequently about David's connection to her work. On many weekends, he accompanied her on trips to bookstores, supply stores and libraries, in search of books and materials to use with the students. He took on the role of "guest speaker" on career day, planning out in advance the pseudo lawsuit scenario between Sarah and Evan as an example of how a lawyer works. Sarah told me, however, that there were two things beyond even these efforts that David provided her with on a continuing basis that supported her most: his belief in her as a teacher and his willingness to listen. Sarah elaborated on his belief in her as a significant support:

> *"He thinks I'm a wonderful teacher, and when there would be days when I would come home and say, 'I can't do this, Evan's had a relapse, something's wrong, I'm not doing this right,' he'd say, 'You're doing a*

wonderful job. Remember what John said, 'It's going to take more than a year to change behaviors that have developed over seven years.' And even times when I have thought that I didn't do the best that I could, he would say, 'Well, you're only human.' In that way, he is a huge, huge support."

It was interesting to me that David provided for Sarah what she provided for her students; he expressed to her that she was a wonderful teacher, while she expressed to her students that she believed they were wonderful students. David also provided Sarah with a listening ear. She explained:

"He listens to me every day, particularly this year when I have come home faced with challenges that I have never had. He has learned that he doesn't have to solve those problems . . . but he can listen and he comments and so forth. I'll throw out ideas and say, 'Alright, I'm down to two ideas about how I can handle this. Should I do this or that? What do you think?' And he'll ask me questions about it and give his opinion. He has learned over the years very much the way I think and my philosophy, so, like when I came home and told him about the discipline meeting, he said, 'Well, maybe you could do this,' and he had all kinds of ideas. He's starting to think that way!" (laughs)

David listened to Sarah on a daily basis. Her reflections about her work with students extended well beyond 3:00 P.M., into the evening and on the weekends at home. I wondered whether or not this enormous investment of her time and energy might not be received negatively by David, but Sarah emphatically stated otherwise. She told me, *"He never ever complains about the fact that I am in so early and I stay late; some teachers have told me their husbands complain, and he never complains. He never complains that I bring work home every night; the only night I don't work at home is Friday. He never complains that I have to do work. It's just always been that way. So that's a huge support."* Listening to Sarah's descriptions of David's support, I sensed his impact upon her praxis was undeniable. Teacher educator Evangelina Jones stated to Mike Rose (1995), "If you don't get support, as a teacher, you die a little every day" (p. 63). I believe that David provided Sarah with fresh hope in herself and her ideas on a regular basis, as well as a sense of freedom that energized her to invest herself in putting these ideas into practice.

Praxis as an Evolution

I do not believe that Sarah experienced "smooth sailing" as she sought to move her class towards a sense of supportive, democratic community. There were days when she went home angry or in tears, months during which she exhausted herself, and moments when she admitted that she did not know whether or not she could continue to move in this direction with these children. I never saw Sarah more upset than on one morning in February, following a day when many of the children had been extremely rude and discourteous to one another. During morning rug time, Sarah told the children, *"I don't think that things are working. Being mean to each other, is that a good neighbor? My first thought* (the previous evening) *was to take everything away . . . we can 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."* As I listened to Sarah speak, I realized that the teaching direction she had chosen to embrace for this school year was dependent upon not only her own ideas and actions, but also the contributions of the children. Daily life in the classroom was laden with risk, unpredictability, and the sense of a loss of control. Despite these realities, however, Sarah remained committed to her direction, even on that day in February.

Flynn and Innes (1992) write, "Community does not develop naturally. It requires tremendous struggle, and the answers to all the tough questions are in the struggle" (p. 203). Sarah experienced a great deal of struggle as she sought to move her class toward community. Although the intensity of the struggle could have easily resulted in retreat toward a more predictable, controlled means of working with her children, it did not. Instead, Sarah's struggle caused her praxis to evolve. Her daily struggles influenced her to look to the support of others she knew, because she needed their advice, their listening ears, and their reminders that she was moving in a good direction. It also prodded her to reflect on what was working and what was not, and to try new approaches based upon these reflections. While the support that Sarah experienced was drawn from particular individuals, Sarah's sense of support was realized because she actively and strategically sought it as part of her reflective process. When she struggled, she chose to reflect. As

she reflected, she chose to seek support. Thus, both struggle and support were essential to the reflective processes that shaped Sarah's praxis.