

**CONTEXTUALIZING ASSESSMENT OF LITERATE-LEARNING:**

**CAN TONY READ AND WRITE?**

by

Pamela J. Simpson

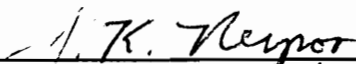
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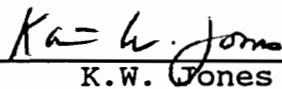
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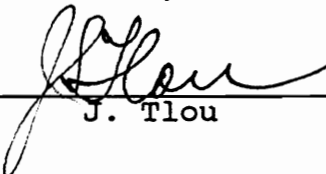
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Committee Chairperson: Jan K. Nespor  
Curriculum and Instruction

(ABSTRACT)

This ethnographic study explores how assessments of literate learning are produced in cultural and institutional settings. Focusing on one student, Tony Mitchell, I situate assessments of his literate learning in the sociocultural contexts in which the assessments were embedded. I examine: 1) the assessments of Tony as "unable to read or write" produced in his fourth grade class; 2) the special education evaluation process in which Tony's abilities were assessed as borderline; 3) the profile of Tony as an able, literate learner I constructed as I worked with him in and out of school between December 1992 and December 1993; and, 4) the assessment of Tony as a reader and writer produced in his fifth grade class.

Data included documents, interviews, and fieldnotes accumulated over an extended period of time and from a wide range of perspectives. Analysis of the data was an ongoing process beginning with the formulation and clarification of

my focus and continuing into the writing phase of the study.

Different cultural and institutional contexts produced discrepant assessments of Tony's literate learning. In instructional and testing environments emphasizing the accumulation of discrete facts, a linear progression of skills, and the transmission of knowledge, Tony was assessed as a non-reader and non-writer with borderline ability. In settings that recognized literate learning as constructed by students as they work with others in supportive environments, Tony was assessed as an able, literate learner.

Tony's story makes visible the often invisible social processes of classroom life and the education policies in which assessments of students' literate learning are embedded. It establishes that assessments of students' literate learning are constructed. It illustrates the relationship between instructional, curricular, and testing practices and assessments of students' learning. Through Tony's story it is clear that to be adequately understood assessments of students' literate learning must be examined in the sociocultural contexts in which they are produced.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. . . . . iv

Chapter	page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Theoretical framework . . . . .	3
Literate-learning through social interaction . . . . .	5
Assessment, instruction and the ZPD . . . . .	9
Need for the study . . . . .	14
Standardized assessments . . . . .	15
Alternative assessments. . . . .	16
Special education assessment . . . . .	18
Classroom assessment . . . . .	20
Nature of the study . . . . .	24
Tony's story as a "point of entry" . . . . .	25
Data collection and analysis . . . . .	27
II. FOURTH GRADE: HE CAN'T READ OR WRITE . . . . .	33
A part of the class: Tony in fourth grade . . . . .	35
Structure of Tony's fourth grade class . . . . .	36
The <i>Early Bird Special</i> . . . . .	37
Spelling rotations . . . . .	40
Reading and writing: novels as the core <i>Whipping Boy</i> . . . . .	43
<i>Phoebe the Spy</i> . . . . .	51
Apart from the class: focusing on skills . . . . .	59
<i>Explode the Code</i> . . . . .	60
Alphabetical order . . . . .	69
Mandated assessments . . . . .	74
Report cards . . . . .	75
Standardized tests . . . . .	79
Seeking help . . . . .	85
III. SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATION OF TONY . . . . .	88
Evaluation for special education services . . . . .	89
Educational/developmental assessments . . . . .	94
Psychological assessments . . . . .	96
A snapshot of Tony's ability . . . . .	101

IV.	PROFILE OF A LITERATE LEARNER . . . . .	105
	Tony: an able, literate learner . . . . .	107
	Talking About learning . . . . .	110
	Tony's stories . . . . .	116
	"The Human Cannonball" . . . . .	116
	"My Day in the Hospital" . . . . .	122
	Using print to gain information . . . . .	126
	Gaining information about cars . . . . .	128
	Mastering <i>Mortal Kombat</i> . . . . .	129
	Reinforcing social interactions . . . . .	131
	Using print to solve problems . . . . .	132
	Alligators and crocodiles . . . . .	133
	Flags . . . . .	135
	Constructing a poster . . . . .	137
	Running records . . . . .	143
	Assuming the role of advocate . . . . .	146
	Advocacy . . . . .	147
	A window on Tony's literacy . . . . .	150
V.	FIFTH GRADE: TONY AS A READER AND WRITER . . . . .	152
	Structure of Ann's fifth grade class . . . . .	154
	A community of readers and writers . . . . .	155
	Collaboration and cooperation . . . . .	162
	Making connections . . . . .	171
	Patterns in poetry. . . . .	171
	Number patterns . . . . .	175
	Patterns in nature. . . . .	180
	Making choices about his own learning. . . . .	186
	Spelling . . . . .	186
	Reading . . . . .	188
	Writing and personal meaning . . . . .	192
	Self-assessment . . . . .	196
	Context for literate-learning . . . . .	204
	Expectations and interactions: releasing control . . . . .	204
	The literate curriculum . . . . .	210
	Community of readers and writers . . . . .	213
VI.	PARTICIPATION, PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES. . . . .	215
	Traditional assessments: snapshots of literate-learning . . . . .	217
	Beyond the photograph's edges . . . . .	219
	Controlling the shot . . . . .	220
	Alternative assessments: windows into literate-learning . . . . .	223
	Potential for self-assessment . . . . .	224



No guarantees . . . . .	226
Assessment in support of learning . . . . .	228
Multiple perspectives . . . . .	231
Multi-directional assessment . . . . .	233
Sharing responsibility . . . . .	236
Climbing together. . . . .	240
Contextualizing assessments of literate learning. . . . .	242

LITERATURE CITED	244
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<u>Appendix</u>	<u>page</u>
A. Research story. . . . .	250
B. Index of fieldwork. . . . .	319
D. Contents of Tony's Confidential Category II file. . . . .	348
E. Report submitted to the Eligibility Committee determining Tony's eligibility for special services. . . . .	353
VITA. . . . .	360

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1. Tony's responses to questions about the novel <i>Whipping Boy</i> . . . . .	49
2. First page of the draft of Tony's letter describing Phoebe's experiences. . . . .	53
3. First page of the final draft of Tony's letter describing Phoebe's experiences . . . . .	54
4. Judith's comments on Tony's student checklist.	58
5. Letter formation corrected by Judith. . . . .	61
6. Tony's self-correction of letter formation. . . . .	62
7. Example from <i>Explode the Code</i> , Book 2. . . . .	64
8. Example from <i>Explode the Code</i> , Book 1 1/2. . . . .	64
9. Example from <i>Explode the Code</i> , Book 1 1/2 . . . . .	65
10. Exmple from <i>Explode the Code</i> Book 2. . . . .	65
11. Example taken from <i>Explode the Code</i> , Book 2. . . . .	67
12. Completed observational checklist. . . . .	92
13. Drawing to accompany "The Human Cannonball". . . . .	120
14. Note written in margin of Tony's <i>Explode the Code</i> . . . . .	131
15. Scrambled note from Tony. . . . .	132
16. Tony calculates how many of him it would take to equal the weight of a 500 pound alligator. . . . .	134
17. List of the flags in the hallways, stairwells and cafeteria at Thurber. . . . .	138
18. Photograph and description of Tony's fifth grade class presenting convocation program. . . . .	141

19.	Photograph of Tony's class during shadow activity. Description written by Tony. . . .	142
20.	Rough draft of the homework machine. . . . .	167
21.	Completed homework machine. . . . .	168
22.	Number patterns Tony threw away. . . . .	176
23.	Tony's self-assessment. . . . .	198
24.	Portfolio with explanation of selection. . .	201
25.	Ann's documentation and analysis of Tony's understanding of regrouping. . . . .	209

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As we begin the last decade of this century much remains to be accomplished in our educational systems. Nowhere is this more evident than in how we assess student growth and achievement ... and then in turn use such assessments to modify and encourage instruction. At the heart of this assessment struggle are divisive educational questions: Who gets to define and describe students' competence and accomplishments? Can one statistically measure the complexities of literacy development? Should a testing bureaucracy be allowed to hold such power...?

Gordon Pradl, *English Education*

"He's doing great," fifth grade teacher Ann McMann said as she handed me Tony Mitchell's most recent work. I stood in the hallway of Thurber Intermediate School on a Wednesday morning in April 1994 and read a journal entry Tony had written following a trip to Miami. He wrote:

I wnt to Miami. We had littel problom with the flite. I mest alot like my friends[.] [I]n Miami I saw som of my cosens like Rocky, Broc, Anthy, Veny, Gary, Diane, Done. Dones birthday is in Aprle 25th. Rockys birthday is in Aprle 24th. [H]e wonts a vet[.] I wont a bepr[.] I'll be 13. I lrnd how to spell 4 wrds excellent, finally, really, tired. I'm reading in my book[.] I'm on page 49.

Having spent much of his life traveling with a carnival, Tony Mitchell had only two weeks of formal instruction when he enrolled at Thurber at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year. Placed in a fourth grade class, Tony's literate abilities did not conform to what teacher Judith Samuelson expected of a typical fourth grader. Judith described Tony as a non-reader and non-writer with possible handicapping conditions. Referred for special education evaluation, Tony was tested and his abilities defined as "borderline." As a participant observer at Thurber, I heard Tony tell stories, explain processes, and use descriptive language. Descriptions of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer were not consistent with the articulate young man I saw in the classroom and hallways of Thurber.

The discrepant assessments of Tony's literate ability puzzled me and raised questions I couldn't ignore. How could assessments of one child differ so drastically? How did Tony's experiences and interactions in specific social and institutional contexts produce contradictory assessments of his literate ability? How did differing instructional, curricular, and assessment practices define Tony as a literate learner? These questions delineated my research and focused my ongoing analysis of data.

The success or failure of any learner must be examined

in the sociocultural context in which the success or failure is evidenced (Taylor, 1993). Consistent with the work of Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (1991) and others I define the sociocultural context as the unique cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which experiences and interactions occur. This document places the assessments of Tony's literate learning in the four sociocultural contexts in which they were embedded. I examine: 1) the assessment of Tony as "unable to read or write" produced in his fourth grade class; 2) the special education evaluation process in which Tony's abilities were assessed as "borderline;" 3) the multi-layered profile of Tony as an able, literate-learner I constructed as I worked with him in and out of school between December 1992 and December 1993; and, 4) the assessment of Tony as a reader and writer produced in his fifth grade class. I use Tony's story as a "point of entry" (Smith, 1987) into conversations about the construction of assessments of students' literate ability, the relationship between curricular and instructional practices and assessments of students' literate ability, and the consequences of assessment practices for students' lives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Almost one hundred years ago in his presidential

address to the American Psychological Association, John Dewey (1901) proposed that psychology could not adequately examine mental functioning by focusing exclusively on the individual organism. Psychology, Dewey (1901) argued, must address how individuals are culturally, historically, and institutionally situated. Until the final quarter of this century Dewey's challenge was largely unheeded by psychologists and educators in the United States.

Since the mid-1970's American psychologists and educators have become increasingly interested in human mental functioning as "an aggregate of contextually situated processes" (Werstch, 1990, p.111). Dissatisfaction with traditional standardized assessments of intelligence and learning (Gardner, 1983) accounts, in part, for changes in theoretical orientation. The shift also stems from on-going conversations about the work of Soviet psychologist and theorist Lev Vygotsky.

In the past fifteen years Vygotsky's work has provided a theoretical framework for psychological studies and more recently for research in educational settings. Research has examined "everyday cognition" (Rogoff & Lave, 1984), "cognition in practice" (Lave, 1988), and "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as forms of social and psychological functioning that contrast dramatically with practices found in classrooms and schools.

Recent studies (e.g., Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989; Hedegaard, 1990; Panofsky, John-Steiner & Blackwell, 1990; Tharp and Gallimore, 1989; Tudge, 1990; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992) address the educational implications and applications of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to mental functioning. With notable exceptions (e.g., Campione & Brown, 1987; Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989; Hedegaard, 1990) few research studies have connected Vygotsky's sociocultural theories on learning to discussions about the purposes, implementation, and consequences of assessment.

This ethnographic study of assessment practices is theoretically grounded in the sociocultural theories of Vygotsky (1978). In defining my theoretical position I examine what a sociocultural perspective means in terms of literate learning and assessment. I discuss Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the "zone of proximal development" and its implications for assessment and instruction.

### Literate-Learning Through Social Interaction

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that the psychological processes unique to human beings have their origins not in biological structures or the learning of the isolated individual but in sociocultural experience. Learning occurs, in other words, as meaning is constructed in social activity and interaction. Lave and Wenger (1991) define



learning through social activity and interaction in terms participation in a community. They state:

[Learning] is mediated by the differences of perspectives among coparticipants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who "learn" under this definition. Learning... is distributed among coparticipants, not a one person act. (p.15)

The learning then is not in the mind of the individual but distributed among the individuals in the activity.

Vygotsky (1978) clarifies a sociocultural perspective further by explaining that learning appears twice. Learning first occurs on a social plane as the learner interacts with human and technological resources. Second, learning appears on a psychological plane as the learner deals with it on an intrapersonal plane. As a novice, my learning about the research process occurred first on the social plane. I connected my interactions "in the field" with my experiences "out of the field" (e.g., my experiences as a teacher, conversations with university faculty, ethnographies I had read, and research courses I had taken). Construction of meaning involved not only the present social event but the interaction between the activity and my unique past experiences and prior knowledge. My learning appeared on

the intrapersonal plane as I internalized and transformed new experiences and constructed personal meaning.

Learning is mediated through language and the learner's interaction with resources (Vygotsky, 1978). As I completed my research and prepared this document, what I "knew" about assessment and literate-learning was distributed among my books, articles, fieldnotes, transcripts, documents and the computer. Wolf, LeMahieu, and Eresh (1991) offer an excellent summary of this idea. They state, "minds function in concert with other minds and the tools their culture makes available" (Wolf et al., 1991, p. 57).

Literate-learning, Vygotsky's theory (1978) suggests, is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process that is transformed through the interaction between activity and the social context (Taylor, 1993). Researchers from the Center for the Study of Writing (Gundlach, Farr and Cook-Gumperz, 1989) describe the process of becoming literate as a kind of apprenticeship. Gundlach, Farr and Cook-Gumperz (1989) suggest literacy-learning involves "particular practices that vary from culture to culture, and even among social groups within a culture" (p.122). They state:

... children's learning is usefully understood as a kind of literacy apprenticeship, in which they learn the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of the

readers and writers with whom they come in contact....  
Becoming literate is ... always a matter of learning  
the knowledge and practices of specific communities of  
writers and readers. (p.122)

Fostered in environments that value approximation and the  
construction of personal representations, literate-learning  
is highly dependent on the context in which it occurs  
(Johnston, 1992).

Standardized assessments ignore the contexts of  
everyday activity and the fact that students "learn  
particular things in particular situations" (Nespor &  
Barber, n.d.). Howard Gardner and his associates at  
Harvard's Project Zero suggest many standardized assessments  
do not provide students opportunities to practice domain-  
relevant tasks and to use newly acquired abilities in  
meaningful contexts. Kornhaber, Krechevsky, and Gardner  
(1990) insist "a focus on testing for an allegedly general  
ability is no longer tenable. We must look instead at  
meaningful performances within a culture (pp.187-8).  
Kornhaber, Krechevsky, and Gardner's (1990) observations  
support the idea of learning through "situated opportunities  
for the improvisational development of new practice" (Lave &  
Wenger, 1991, p.97). Rather than the teacher presenting  
lessons designed to improve skills or transmit knowledge,

the focus shifts to a learning-centered curriculum in which teachers and students jointly participate in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994). Considering literate-learning from this perspective requires educators to be less interested in how students perform on tests than in what learners do in collaboration and cooperation with other people and resources (Nesbor & Barber, n.d.).

### Assessment, Instruction and the "ZPD"

Connecting many aspects of his theory, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the "zone of proximal development" is relevant to discussions about assessment. Vygotsky (1978) defines the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) as the distance between a learner's "actual development level as determined by independent problem solving" and the higher level of "potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). The ZPD is not, however, a predetermined, definable space waiting to be discovered by the teacher. Instead, Vygotsky's work suggests the ZPD is space jointly constructed by the teacher and the student. It is in this constructed space where, through interaction and activity mediated by language and technological resources, learning occurs.

Instruction, Vygotsky (1978) posits, should be tied

more closely to the level of potential development than to the level of actual development. "[The] only 'good' learning," he contends, "is that which is in advance of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). To be useful, assessment in-support-of-learning must focus not on facts the student can recall. Instead, assessment must focus on what the student is capable of doing in supportive environments with the aid of human and technological resources.

Vygotsky (1978) insists that the abilities and understandings the learner acquires are directly related to their experiences and interactions with others in problem solving situation. Emphasis focuses on learning that occurs in social settings where the teacher and learner participate mutually and actively. The learner in such settings is not merely a recipient of information. Nor is the teacher simply the "expert" facilitating the learner's next instructional step. Essential to Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development is the inter-dependence of the teacher and learner as they share responsibilities and jointly solve problems.

Central to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development is the teacher's role in supporting developing abilities and understandings. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) describe the support provided in the zone of proximal

development as "scaffolding." Scaffolding "enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p.90). Like the scaffolding used by brick masons, scaffolding to extend a learner's thinking or understandings is intended to provide support that is temporary and adjustable (Palinscar, 1986). Once the building is complete the brick mason's scaffolding is removed. Likewise, scaffolding provided by the teacher is gradually withdrawn as the learner demonstrates increased competence with the task.

The scaffolding metaphor is limited in that it implies a definable beginning and ending to the construction process. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development suggests a more cyclical or spiralling process. As experiences are internalized and transformed and learning occurs, the student's zone of proximal development changes. The nature and amount of support provided by the teacher must change accordingly. The cycle or spiral continues as learning advances and students think about events, processes and meanings in different or more advanced ways. Meaningful scaffolding is always on the edge of the learner's continually changing zone of proximal development.

Failure to see the zone of proximal development in the context of the whole of Vygotsky's (1978) theory can make it

difficult to differentiate between scaffolding and other instructional methods. Scaffolding is not simply a process of the teacher leading students through a sequence of steps designed to teach a specific skill. Instead, scaffolding builds on students' interests and abilities. By scaffolding, teachers create opportunities for learners to express their needs, understandings, and the meanings they are constructing. Teachers support learning by involving students in authentic, purposeful activities that will stretch their capacities. The teacher supports, without controlling, the learners' "natural continuous construction and reconstruction of new, richer, more complex and more connected meanings" (Poplin, 1988b).

Vygotsky (1978) introduced the zone of proximal development as an alternative to the static individual nature of intelligence tests. In the framework of the ZPD, the emphasis shifts from assessing abilities and understandings that have matured, or "fossilized," to assessment of developing abilities and understandings. Rather than measuring fixed understandings distanced from the social and mental aspects of learning, assessments in the ZPD examine the dynamic, fluid processes involved as meaning is constructed and changed. Assessment within the ZPD focuses on what the learner can do in a collaborative activity rather than on what the learner can do in

isolation.

In this context, assessment is a part of instruction rather than something "added on" to serve a political purpose. Rather than assessing something in-the-individual-head, the focus shifts to examining and understanding learning-in-social-activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989) describe this kind of assessment. They state:

Instead of giving the children a task and measuring how well they do or how badly they fail, one can give the children the task and observe how much and what kind of help they need in order to complete the task successfully. In this approach the child is not assessed alone. Rather, the social system of the child and the teacher is dynamically assessed to determine how far along it had progressed. (pp. 77-78)

A natural and integral part of the curriculum, assessment supports instruction and involves students as active participants. Assessment practices thus provide additional opportunities for students to make connections by working with others.

It is not difficult to imagine how quantitative measurements of mastered skills or abilities might define a learner. Measurements of in-the-individual-head



competencies produce different assessments of a learner's ability than efforts to understand the learner-in-social-activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Assessments of what can be accomplished in a supportive environment with the use of human and technological resources might look different. This study focuses on contextually different settings in which different assessments of one student's literate-learning were produced.

### **Need for the Study**

This ethnographic study examines how social, cultural and institutional contexts produce assessments. More specifically, this study considers how particular instructional, curricular, and assessment practices defined one student's, Tony Mitchell's, literate ability. The nature of the study required that I look at existing research on assessment. Initially I focused on the impact of standardized testing on instruction, curriculum, teachers, and students. I also examined the potential offered by alternative forms of assessment such as portfolio, performance tasks, and exhibitions. As my work with Tony narrowed the parameters of my research, I looked at the role of standardized assessment in evaluating students for placement in special education programs and at research on classroom assessment.

## Standardized Assessments

Much of the recent research on assessment centers on the negative effects of standardized tests (e.g., Dorr-Bremme & Herman, 1986; Herman & Golan, 1991; Herman, Dreyfus, & Golan, 1990; Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenberg & Cherland, 1991). Winograd, Paris, and Bridge (1991), for example, cite "lost instructional time, confused students, and frustrated teachers [as]... part of the price paid for assessments that do not conform to curricular reforms" (p. 108). Based on a nationwide survey of teachers and principals, Dorr-Bremme and Herman (1986) conclude eight to ten percent of the available instructional time in the elementary schools studied was spent testing. Further, teachers change their instruction to focus more arduously on the content of standardized tests (Dorr-Bemme & Herman, 1986) and neglect valuable parts of the curriculum because they are not covered on the test (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). Teachers in the schools Smith et al. (1991) studied spent less time having students write in authentic contexts, reading trade books, and completing long-term integrated projects. The findings of Smith et. al. (1990) further support the premise that standardized testing adversely effects instruction.

Standardized tests serve as a sorting mechanism and allow people to be categorized based on arbitrary,

impersonal, generalizable criteria (Madaus & Tan, 1993). Standardized intelligence and achievement test scores provide the bases for separating students into different categories and creating a language of ranks: "learning disabled," "low-achieving," "gifted," and "academically talented." Decision makers measure performance and allocate access to opportunities or resources based on apparently objective qualifications or merit. Such practices deny a vast majority of American students access to the best teachers, resources, and instruction (Fass, 1989; Oakes & Lipton, 1990; Rose, 1988; Taylor, 1991, 1993). Tests results are used to make what can amount to life-changing decisions about students (Madaus & Tan, 1993).

### Alternative Assessments

Issues of fairness and equity of access to teachers, resources, and opportunities, are not solved simply by shifting from standardized tests to alternative assessments such as portfolios, performance tasks, and exhibitions (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991). Questions of fairness and equity must be addressed throughout the design, implementation, scoring, and evaluation of alternative assessments (Rothman, 1992). Alternative assessments, according to Shavelson and Baxter (1992), are extremely curriculum-sensitive and lack of access to equipment and

hands-on science instruction can put some students at a disadvantage. Dennie Wolf , senior research associate at Harvard, argues alternative assessments such as portfolios give distinct advantages to those fluent in English. She states, "Until we break the stranglehold of language on portfolios and open them up, we will again have in portfolios just a different ... sorting method" (quoted in Rothman, 1992, p. 24).

Gene Maeroff (1991) asserts there is reason to believe the weakest students might look even worse on alternative assessments. He cites the increased the gap between ethnic groups occurring when British schools changed to alternative assessments as an example. Wolf et al. (1991) suggest greater gaps between groups "could reflect the fact some students have been taught how to enter into and make use of new modes of assessment, whereas others have been left to flounder" (p. 62). All students must have equitable opportunities to experience alternative assessments and be aware of the assumptions underlying their use. Otherwise, "alternative assessments will reproduce rather than challenge old patterns of performance across lines of gender, class, race, and ethnicity" (Wolf et al., 1991, p.62).

As attractive as alternative assessments sound, they may not represent a great departure from the traditional

psychometric, technological orientation of assessment in the second half of this century (Berlak, 1992). Attempting to avoid the multiple-choice format, alternative assessments are intended to approximate authentic tasks such as writing a letter or solving a problem. Often students' products are scored based on a hierarchical rubric which identifies specific criteria for evaluating student performance. Whose knowledge is valued in establishing criteria for the rubric and whose judgments are valued in comparing students' work to the rubric are questions which must be addressed. The education community must cautiously consider whether moves to alternatives truly explore the possibilities of contextualized assessment or simply change the configuration and names of assessments within traditional paradigms.

Like standardized tests, alternative forms of assessment define students' literate-abilities in particular ways. Research must examine the underlying theoretical framework and assumptions on which alternative assessments such as portfolios, performance tasks, and exhibitions are based, implemented, and interpreted. Only then will the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which assessments are produced be revealed.

### Special Education Assessment

Nowhere are the consequences of assessments more

evident than in the evaluation of students for placement in special educational programs. One of the most dramatic examples of the destructive link between assessment and categorizing students is seen in Denny Taylor's (1991) Learning Denied. Taylor relates the story of Patrick whose early years in school were filled with testing and retesting as school officials sought the "cause" of his "problem." Taylor evaluated Patrick's ability based on his performance in authentic literacy contexts. At home and in the context of his work with Taylor, Patrick was an able, literate learner. School decision-makers, however, reduced Patrick's abilities to a set of scores on standardized tests and reports written by "experts." Based on *objective* data, Patrick's problems were identified and school officials sought to label him as "educationally handicapped."

The contrast between assessments of Patrick's literate-learning in school and out of school were dramatic. Taylor situates assessments of Patrick as a "failure" in the context of the special education evaluation process. Students' "failure" in school, however, involves more than the administration and interpretation of standardized tests. The "failure" of students cannot be fully understood without positioning the failed performance in their classroom interactions and the student's perceptions of those interactions (Johnston, 1992). Taylor (1991) provides few

details about Patrick's experiences in the classroom or his interactions with peers. As compelling as Patrick's story is, Taylor leaves a sizable portion of Patrick's life as a first and second grader unexamined, therefore, denying the reader a well-defined context in which to situate the student.

### Classroom Assessment

Alternative assessments and standardized tests are only part of the assessment picture. Teachers are the primary assessors in students' educational lives (Johnston, 1992; Johnston, Afflerbach, and Weiss, 1993; Paris, Calfee, Filby, Hiebert, Pearson, Valencia, & Wolf, 1992; Winograd, Paris, & Bridge, 1991). Teachers' assessments define their instructional interactions with students, shape the classroom curriculum (Page, 1987; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991), and significantly influence students' self-assessments (Crooks, 1988; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Nicholls, 1989; Rasinski & DeFord, 1988; Wolf & Perry, 1988). Furthermore, three fourths of the students referred for special education evaluation by their teachers are subsequently labeled and placed in special programs (Algozzinme, Christenson, & Ysseldyke, 1982; Mehan, 1984; Pugach, 1985). In short, teachers' assessments of their students have important consequences for students' lives

(Johnston et al., 1993, p.92).

Although changes in assessment policies and practices are increasingly being initiated, defined, and implemented by classroom teachers (O'Neil, 1992; Hebert, 1992), there is little research on teachers' assessment practices (Johnston et al., 1993; Stiggins & Conklin, 1992; Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985; Stiggins, Conklin, & Bridgeford, 1986). Existing studies focus on the procedures teachers follow to assign grades (e.g., Stiggins, Frisbie, & Griswold, 1989), the quality of teachers' paper and pencil tests (e.g., Carter, 1984; Fleming & Chamber, 1983), the nature and quality of observational assessment methods (e.g., Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985), or the purposes of teachers' assessment (e.g., Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). Much of what has been written about teachers' classroom assessment practices addresses how to implement alternative assessments (e.g., Glazer & Brown, 1993; Hill & Rubtic, 1994; Stenmark, 1993; ) or recounts teachers' successful efforts to introduce assessment strategies such as portfolios or exhibitions (e.g., Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Krechevsky, 1991; Hanson, 1992; Hebert, 1992). With the notable exceptions of Denny Taylor (1990, 1991, 1993) and Peter Johnston (1992; Johnston et al., 1993), few researchers or education policymakers focus on the relationship between classroom assessment, instructional and curricular practices, and assessments of



students' literate-learning.

In a recent study Peter Johnston, Peter Afflerbach and Paula Weiss (1993) address how teachers' assessment techniques and frameworks were influenced by their knowledge, values, and their teaching situation. A group of fifty teachers were asked to describe their curricular and instructional goals, assessment practices, and the literacy development of two students. The authors conclude that in classrooms dominated by literature, teachers assess literacy development by looking at the books students' choose to read and discuss and through the students' written reflections on the books.

Assessments of students' literacy development in classrooms dominated by district or state-mandated tests and basal readers were brief and impersonal. In such classrooms, descriptions of students' literacy development reflected less detailed knowledge of the students and less involved relationships. The authors suggest "teachers' knowledge and values were seen to influence their assessments of children's literacy learning .... Their assessments were also influenced by the extent of control under which they worked" (Johnston et al., 1993, p.113). The role of teachers' knowledge, values, and beliefs in assessment of students' literacy learning, the authors insist, should be taken very seriously.

In summarizing research on teachers' assessments Lazar-Morris, Poplin, May and Barry (1980) suggest the constructs and consequences of teachers' classroom assessments must be carefully scrutinized. They state:

How these and other assessments are united with teacher instructional decision-making processes and how they affect classroom organization and time allocation to other objectives are areas that should be explored. Teachers place greater reliance on, and have more confidence in, the results of their own judgements of student performance, but little is known about [these] kinds of activities. (Lazar et al, 1980, p. 24-25)

Teachers' knowledge and values as well as the institutional contexts in which they work influence their reading of students and what happens in the classroom (see Johnston, et al., 1993; Nesper, 1987; Peterson & Comeaux, 1987; Roehler, Duffy, Herrmann, Conley, & Johnson, 1988). Yet, as Lazar-Morris et al. (1990) note, the role of teachers' assessments in defining students' literate-ability remains largely unexplored (Johnston, et al., 1993).

This document examines assessments of Tony Mitchell's literate ability produced in the contexts of his fourth grade class, the special education evaluation process, my work with him between December 1992 and December 1993, and

his fifth grade class. Multiple perspectives provide a textual picture and enable the reader to better understand the complexity of the experiences described and the issues raised. Rich descriptions of the four contexts in which assessments of Tony's literate ability were produced allow readers to make comparisons and perhaps relate Tony's story to the experiences of other children. By sharing Tony's story, I hope to make visible the otherwise invisible social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which assessments of students' ability and literate learning are embedded.

#### **Nature of the Study**

My work with Tony was situated within the context of a collaborative research study at Thurber, a culturally diverse intermediate school (grades 3-5) in a mid-sized city in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The student population of approximately 180 is about 60% European-American and 40% African-American. About 55% of the students qualify for the Federal Free Lunch Program and another 5-10% for reduced lunch fees. There are seven self-contained classes: three third grade, two fourth grade, and two fifth.

Thurber is moving toward an integrated "whole language" curriculum and trying to define what that means in concrete

terms. Teachers have initiated cooperative/collaborative learning, literature-based and thematic instruction, and portfolios. Eliminating letter grades on report cards, they have substituted the letters M (mastery), T (trying), and N (needs help) and, in some cases, narratives as alternative ways to communicate students' progress to parents.

Implementing alternative assessments such as portfolios and narratives brought many questions to the forefront. In November of the 1992-1993 school year, teachers at Thurber identified assessment as an area for collaborative study. Initially my research incorporated the teachers' interest in alternative assessments and my interest in assessment as a social issue. I begin by studying teachers' conversations about and implementation of portfolio assessment. I focused on how teachers made sense of changes to alternative forms of assessment.

#### Tony's Story as a "Point of Entry"

I began working with Tony in December of the 1992-93 school year. My work with him was not intended to be part of the research I was doing on how teachers understood and implemented changes to alternative forms of assessment. I was working with Tony because I was captivated personally and professionally by him. The descriptions of Tony as "unable to read or write" troubled me. I hoped to create an

environment for an hour once or twice a week where he could be successful and begin to see himself as a literate person. By the end of the 92-93 school year, Tony had been identified by his fourth grade teacher as a non-reader and non-writer, referred, and evaluated for special education placement. Based on his test scores, the psychologist's labeled Tony's abilities as "borderline." At that point it no longer seemed sufficient for me to merely be a mentor and support Tony's learning at school.

Tony's story provides a compelling "point of entry" (Smith, 1987) into important assessment issues and questions. Sharing Tony's story offers one way "to influence the policy and practice of education" (Berliner, 1992, p.159). Tony's story contributes to an understanding of the importance of contextualizing assessments of literate-learning. Grounded in an authentic situation, Tony's story provides a holistic, multi-perspective explanation of events, shows how processes work over time, and leads to strong theoretical insights and generalizations (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991). Tony's story allows me to generalize from the specific situation investigated to theories of such events. Through Tony's story individuals participating in similar processes or situations may re-think basic preconceptions and categories (Wieviorka, 1992) and imagine how things might be changed.

## Data Collection and Analysis

To be fully understood, assessments of Tony's abilities and literate-learning had be examined in the context of the classroom, the school, and his interactions with others (Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1993). Drawing on Denny Taylor's (1990) idea of "personal literacy configurations," I began in December 1992, to construct a profile of Tony based on multiple sources of information. As a participant observer at Thurber over an extended period of time, I moved with Tony from the classroom to the lunchroom, library, or playground. I also interacted with Tony outside of school: visiting his home, going to the library, shopping for comic books, or just "hanging out." It was crucial that I look "across situations," as Denny Taylor (1993) suggests, "to the environments people build for each other" (p.12). Taylor states:

In trying to gain some understanding of the social and academic accomplishments of teachers and children in classrooms, we need to make explicit the complexity of classroom life. We must examine the everyday life of classrooms in which the failure of the child is evidenced [and] ... make visible the invisible or ordinary social processes of classroom life ....  
(pp.16-17)

I worked beside Tony as he completed class assignments, talked with and about family and friends, and created narratives linking his in-school experiences to his out-of-school world. I also interacted with teachers and administrators at Thurber in both formal (classroom, faculty meetings, inservice workshops, interview, PTA meetings) and informal settings (teachers' lounge, lunches, school fairs). Many of these occasions were audiotaped and transcribed. All were recorded in fieldnotes written as soon after the event as possible. In addition to their descriptive value, observational fieldnotes helped me situate and contextualize other forms of data collected (see Briggs, 1986).

Documents were an important component of data collection. They served as a source of "sensitizing concepts" and revealed ways the "authors ... organize[d] their experience..." (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p.130). I collected official documents (i.e., cumulative records, tests results, report cards, and correspondence) as well as copies of Tony's classwork (i.e., journals, reports, learning log entries, etc.). Keenly aware that the "documents were written in a social context, with some audience in mind..." (Delamont, 1992, p.105), I paid attention to the circumstances of the documents' construction, reading and examining them in relation to their social context.

Analysis of the data was an ongoing process beginning with the formulation and clarification of an orienting focus that framed my activities and sensitized me to the issues, and continuing into the writing phase of the study. Formally, it encompassed my fieldnotes, journal, and analytic memos. On an informal level it included my ideas and hunches (Ely, Anzul, Freedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989). Data analysis was an integral part of the research as "theory building and data collection are dialectically linked" (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p.174). My analysis became increasingly more focused as the research progressed allowing the study to be "developed or transformed, and eventually its scope ... clarified and delimited and its internal structure explored" (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p. 175). Progressive focusing precipitated a gradual shift in emphasis, from a description of events and processes to development and testing of possible explanations.

My analysis then represents my effort to use narrative structure to sort out my interpretations and understandings. It was through the process of "re-storying" that I made personal meaning of experiences and interactions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986). Connelly and Clandinin (1986) suggest that "it is when we ask ourselves the meaning of a story, and tell it in a narrative, that we reconstruct the meaning



recovered in the story" (p.81) Acknowledging that the meaning created, and through narrative re-constructed was essentially mine, I tried to make visible to the reader the process of construction. Although I weave together many voices (Tony, teachers, the literature and my own) the story is partial. It is integrally bound to whose words I chose to hear, where I chose to observe, what I chose to record, and which events I chose to include as I constructed Tony's story. The story of my research and an index of my fieldwork are included in Appendix A and B respectively.

There are five additional chapters included in this work. Chapter Two positions assessments of Tony in the context of his fourth grade class. I consider how the assessment of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer was produced in Judith Samuelson's fourth grade class. I examine the structure of Judith's class, how Tony's abilities were assessed, and the specifics of his instructional program. The chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of the instructional, curricular, and assessment practices that defined Tony as "unable to read or write" in the fourth grade

In Chapter Three I examine the assessment of Tony's ability as "borderline" in the context of the special education evaluation process. I explore how Tony's performance and ability were assessed and summarized,

focusing particularly on implied meanings and contextual details omitted. The chapter provides a clear look at how the orientation of the special education evaluation process defined Tony's ability as "borderline."

Based on my one-on-one work with Tony, Chapter Four constructs a profile of him as an able, literate-learner. Using categories established by Heath (1983), Taylor (1983), Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and expanded by Taylor (1993), I discuss how Tony used print to construct stories, to gain information to meet the needs of his everyday life, to reinforce social interactions, and to solve problems. The chapter constructs a view of Tony based on my documentation of what he could do. Lastly, chapter Four offers an explanation of my shift to an advocacy role (Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1993).

Chapter Five describes Tony's assessment as a capable reader and writer in the context of his fifth grade class. I examine Tony's inclusion in the classroom community of readers and writers and his purposeful use of linguistic resources as tools for thinking, cooperation, and communication. I consider Tony's interactions and experiences in an instructional environment that encouraged him to build connections, make choices about his own learning, draw on personally meaningful experiences, and self-assess his own learning. The chapter provides a

detailed description and analysis of the instructional, curricular and assessment practices that defined Tony as a capable reader and writer in his fifth grade class.

In Chapter Six I synthesize threads of analysis introduced in the preceding chapters. I suggest that assessment should support instruction and explore students' potential rather than test facts students have "learned." I extend current thinking by proposing co-participatory, multi-directional assessment practices in which teachers and students share responsibility and create nurturing learning spaces. I argue for a multi-perspectival approach to assessment that situates learners' performances and literate development within the social and institutional context.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ASSESSING TONY IN THE FOURTH GRADE

Teachers ... imbue children's behavior with meaning differently, depending on how they have constructed their own knowledge of children and literate activity. In this way, each evaluative act is at once social and personal, and because of its consequences, political. (original emphasis)

Peter Johnston, *Constructive Evaluation of Literate Activity*

On the first day of the 1992-93 school year, Judith Samuelson knew eleven year-old Tony Mitchell could not read or write. Tony had spent much of his life traveling with a small carnival-type circus and very little time in school. In mid-February of the previous school year (1991-92) Tony enrolled at Thurber Intermediate School for the first time and was placed in Judith's self-contained fourth grade class. Two weeks later, in early March 1992, Tony was withdrawn with no explanation. As far as I know, those two weeks represented the extent of Tony's formal instruction, prior to the 1992-93 school year. In September 1992 he once again enrolled at Thurber and was placed in Judith's fourth grade class.

In an interview in July 1994 Judith explained that Tony had requested placement in her class when he enrolled again at Thurber in September 1992. His request, she suggested, indicated his positive attitude toward her class based on

his experiences the previous year. She noted, "I really feel that this was an indication that he felt support and was comfortable in my class during those two weeks that he had been with me."

In conversations in the teachers' lounge Judith described Tony by saying, "He doesn't know how to read or write and his math skills are limited. What am I supposed to do with a child who's not been to school? I think it's a shame, but there's only so much the school can do." Though Tony's literate abilities were not typical for a fourth grader, Judith described the high expectations she had for him. She stated, "I had very high expectations for Tony as well as for the rest of my class. I certainly knew of ways to work with him and I did work with him positively. I did not give up on him." Research suggests (e.g., Johnston, 1992; Johnston et al., 1993) teachers' observations frame their expectations for students (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1980), shape their instructional interactions with students, define the nature of the literate curriculum, and have significant consequences for students' educational lives .

The assessment of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer is the focus of this chapter. I examine the classroom environment in which Tony was immersed, concentrating on the structure of the class and the nature of the language arts curriculum. I explore how Tony was in some ways separated

from the rest of the class by his skill-orientated instructional program. I discuss how the constraints imposed by standardized testing influenced the structure of the class. In this chapter I analyze the specific instructional, curricular, and assessment practices that defined Tony as "unable to read or write."

### **A Part of the Class: Immersing Tony in Fourth Grade**

In a follow-up interview in March 1994, Judith described Tony's instructional and curricular program during the 1992-93 school year. "I tried to immerse him as much as possible in what we were doing," she explained. Tony would benefit, Judith believed, "by listening and being a part of language arts activities. We worked towards building on his skills to become more literate and he showed growth." Examining the structure of her class and specific language arts activities Judith initiated sheds light on the classroom in which Tony was immersed and assessed as a non-reader and non-writer.

Language arts in Judith's classroom included spelling, grammar, reading, and writing. All four subjects were incorporated into activities and skill lessons that related to novels the class read. Activities, such as the *Early Bird Special*, spelling rotations, and novels, structured the language arts curriculum and the instructional routine in

Judith's fourth grade class.

### Structure of Judith's Fourth Grade

I observed in Judith Samuelson's fourth grade class for the first time in early November 1992. When I arrived I found Judith and two students kneeling on the floor. Papers were stacked in piles all around them as they hurriedly tried to sort students' work before class began at nine o'clock. In her late twenties, Judith had been teaching for five years, the last three at Thurber.

Hoping to find a spot out of the main flow of activity in the classroom, I put my things on a chair between one of the computers and the printer. I took out my notebook and began to look around, jot down details, and sketch the floor plan of the classroom. Desks for the twenty-four students in Judith's class were arranged in groups of four to six. The room contained many of the familiar conventions of school: four computers and a printer, a rolling cart holding a TV and VCR, maps, bulletin boards, a tape recorder with headphones, and a chalkboard.

The walls were decorated with posters and displays Judith had made to reinforce concepts and expand on themes introduced in fourth grade. Judith had copied the words to *America* on a large sheet of bulletin board paper that stretched from the ceiling almost to the floor. A square

sheet of yellow bulletin board paper displayed the web Judith had recorded as students brainstormed words and phrases related to the theme of trust. Large globes the teacher had drawn on poster board illustrated the concepts of latitude and longitude for students. A computer generated banner urging students to do their best filled the space above the closet and bookshelves in the back of the room. As I walked around and copied names off the tags on the desks, students filed in and within minutes the morning routine began. As I was to realize through repeated observations across the school year, the class had a defined and stable structure.

The *Early Bird Special*. Each morning Judith had an activity she called the *Early Bird Special* on the board for students to begin the day. Some of the activities included writing sentences for their spelling words, writing a paragraph, completing numerical patterns, or performing basic math operations. Though the content and nature of the task varied from day to day, the structure of the *Early Bird Special* remained the same. When bookbags and jackets were hung in the closet and students sat at their desks, Judith explained the *Early Bird Special* and urged everyone to "get started."

Judith used the *Early Bird Special* to review previously



taught skills or to provide additional practice with new skills. As students finished the *Early Bird Special* they often brought their papers to Judith. She looked at their work, asked questions, encouraged their efforts, or praised their accomplishments by saying "That's a good sentence" or "I really like that." At times Judith would go over the assignment with the whole class to make sure definitions or computational processes were understood. Scheduling problems sometimes prevented papers from being checked immediately, but "students clearly knew that the [*Early Bird Special*] would be checked," Judith noted. At times the assignments were saved to use in small group instruction or incorporated into language arts or math rotations. It was in the small groups, Judith explained, that she identified who needed additional help.

Tony's focus during the *Early Bird Special* depended on the nature of the assignment. When the task included math problems, he would copy some of the problems, but frequently did not complete the operations. Tony attempted assignments requiring him to continue a pattern, but not those asking him to write a paragraph. If the *Early Bird Special* task centered on spelling words, Tony used a list of words Judith had given him rather than the words assigned to the rest of the class. On the mornings I observed in Judith's class, Tony copied portions of the *Early Bird Special* and then put

his notebook in his desk without asking for any assistance. Tony shared his thoughts about doing the *Early Bird Special* as we talked one morning in May 1993. He stated:

Some of them [the *Early Bird Special* activities] I just do them in my notebook and leave them there. Some things I think in my mind and it sounds so easy. Then when I try to do them it's really hard. Like this song I got.... I can sing it really good in my mind; but when I try to sing it out loud it's horrible.

In responding to Tony's comments about the *Early Bird Special* in a conversation in July 1994, Judith noted:

I think that this [Tony's comment] shows some of the concerns that we had had about maybe his possible problems and difficulty in processing things. He's giving you [Pam] an example right here of a difficulty that he has in thinking about something and actually performing [or] doing it.

The *Early Bird Special* established the structure of Judith's class each morning. It involved students in independent problem solving and minimized the distractions associated with the beginning of each day. *Early Bird Special* tasks frequently related directly to another component of Judith's language arts program: vocabulary

development and spelling rotations.

Spelling Rotations. Included in *Early Bird Special* assignments and other classroom work, vocabulary development and spelling were important components of literacy instruction in Judith's class. Each week Judith selected vocabulary-spelling words from the novel the class was reading. Students were expected to spell the words accurately and use each word correctly in a sentence on a test each Friday. During my first visit in November the week's words were taken from the novel Whipping Boy and included:

famous retrieve wince compass bog surge embankment  
West Virginia \* Charleston Kentucky \* Frankfort

Judith listed the words on the board and provided opportunities for students to practice their words during the spelling rotations.

Though Tony's spelling list was different than the rest of the class, he occasionally used words from the weekly list. Judith explained:

He asked me if he could use one or two of the words we were doing and in the immersion he learned those words as well. He could identify them also. Just like the other students had to read what those words were, he

did the very same thing they did. He was just also building a foundation with some of the words from *Explode the Code*. I was trying to make it more appropriate so that he could be successful.

The spelling rotations occurred during an hour block of time on alternating mornings. During the rotations students were required to complete five activities (i.e., computer, sticky-wickets, salt trays, *Spell-X*, and *Quick Words*), but were allowed to rotate from one to another based on their choice and the availability of material. The diversity of the activities, Judith believed, met the various learning styles of her students. For example, long strands of a candlewick-like material called sticky-wickets allowed students needing tactile experiences to physically spell out the vocabulary-spelling words. Salt trays provided an opportunity for students to write their words in salt using their finger or the eraser end of a pencil. The computer provided a visual way for students to practice their vocabulary-spelling words. Judith entered the vocabulary-spelling words on a computer program so drills or games were directly related to students' words for the week.

*Spell-X* contained the spellings of different forms of hundreds of words. Happier, happiest, happiness, happily, for example, were listed as forms of the word happy. Judith

asked students to look up each vocabulary-spelling word and copy all the different spellings. *Quick Words* also listed hundreds of frequently used words and provided space for students to add their own words. Each page was divided into two columns. The outside column listed alphabetically dozens of words beginning with a particular letter. On the inside column, students generated their own list of words beginning with that letter. Students were encouraged to add to their *Quick Words* whenever a word was important or useful to them and when Judith requested it.

During his year in fourth grade Tony wrote twenty-four words in his *Quick Words*. Ten of the words he added were already spelled correctly in the outside column of the booklet. Words Tony included were: Al, bass, bib, dig, pan, rag, sincerely, scat, sis, thank, tan, tag, van, and wag. With the exception of sincerely and thank, the words Tony listed in his *Quick Words* appeared frequently in his phonics workbook. Though he entered words as required, Tony did not use his *Quick Words* as a reference any of the times I observed him writing. The words he recorded may not have been ones he frequently used in his writing or perhaps he simply forgot. Though he added words to his *Quick Words*, Tony evidently did not consider the list a tool he could use to improve his spelling, support his reading, or enhance his writing.

The spelling rotation and the *Early Bird Special* illustrated Judith's efforts to plan purposeful activities and establish a well-defined, stable classroom routine. Descriptions of the spelling rotation and *Early Bird Special* helped define Judith's language arts program and provided a glimpse of Tony's experiences as part of the class. The language arts program and Tony's experiences in Judith's class were further defined by the use of novels as the basis for reading and writing instruction.

#### Reading and Writing: Novels as the Core

Judith organized her reading and writing instruction around novels. Teachers at Thurber had identified several novels appropriate for each grade level. Multiple copies of the novels were available through the school library. Judith determined which novels the class read and designed accompanying activities to integrate different content areas and address specific language arts skills. Occasionally chapters were read and discussed by the class as a whole. More often Judith read and discussed a portion of the book with one group of students, while a second group completed assigned activities. Tony was included in one reading group, given a copy of the book, and encouraged to listen as other students read the text.

*Whipping Boy: supporting literacy-learning.* By early

November, Judith and her students were reading their second novel, *Whipping Boy*, by Sid Fleishmann. In the imaginary kingdom Fleishmann created, it was against the law to spank the young heir to the throne. Rescued from the sewers, a orphan named Jemmy was brought to the castle to be whipped in place of the incorrigible Prince Horace (known to everyone in the kingdom as Prince Brat). Unable to tolerate their individual situations, Prince Horace and Jemmy ran away. The boys were captured by the notorious highwaymen, Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater. During their adventurous escape, Prince Horace learned how to survive and the two boys became friends.

The discussion of the novel that occurred during my first observation focused on three chapters in the middle of the book. "Get out your novel," Judith said as Chapter One students returned to the room and the rest of the class finished the spelling rotations. "We read chapters 12 and 13 on Monday. I need someone to help me remember what happened. Jemmy was betrayed?" she continued, her inflection making the sentence a question rather than a statement.

Frank: Prince Brat told on him.

Judith: Did he [Jemmy] have a plan for escape? What happened after the plan didn't work?

Tammy: He ran away.

Judith: Did he [Jemmy] just run or did he wait for an opportunity? What did he run into?

Ethan: Jemmy ran into -- I forget....

Judith: What did Jemmy run into?

Angela: He ran into a bear.

Judith: Was he [Jemmy] afraid?

Don: He was afraid. He hid in a hollow tree.

Kevin: He hid there in the hollow tree and cuddled up inside it.

Judith: Who did he [Jemmy] run into?"

Christi: Prince Brat.

Judith: What did Prince Brat say to Jemmy?

Don: They had a little disagreement. Prince Brat said he was going with Jemmy. Jemmy said no and for him to go home.

Judith: Let's go back and skim for a sample sentence.

Don: It's on page 44. Prince Brat said he wanted to go with Jemmy. Jemmy said, "Not likely."

Judith: What are you learning about Prince Brat?

Frank: That he really does care about Jemmy.

Judith: Maybe Jemmy's the closest thing to a friend Prince Brat has.

From my perspective the interaction between Judith and



the class followed what Courtney Cazden (1988) describes as a student-teacher-student-teacher lesson sequence.

Regaining control of the discussion after every student, Judith frequently reformulated questions to simplify the task or orient students' toward specific answers (Cazden, 1988). Judith assessed students' comprehension based on their ability to reproduce answers consistent with her focus and interpretation of the text.

Judith provided her perspective in a conversation in July 1994. She described the interaction as "a questioning strategy." She stated:

[It was] used to refocus their attention and tap into the understanding of what they had been reading the day before. Here at our school we were providing so much more and trying to use new techniques and methodologies. It was not a typical student-teacher-student-teacher **lecture** per se. It was an attempt to use new methodologies and teaching techniques. There are times for answering literal questions and where there are right and wrong answers. I always try to work in the inferential [aspects] within my questioning and my activities. For example in the response log and the types of questions I asked them to respond to. Always in the comprehension questions there was at

least one inferential question if not more than that I was asking students.

Following discussion of the reading lesson, Judith outlined how students would use the remainder of the language arts time. "We're going to have sustained silent reading (SSR) for the next ten minutes," Judith told the class. "Read chapter fourteen." With the exception of Tony, everyone read individually for the next ten minutes. Judith asked one of the girls to read to Tony. Tony and his partner moved quietly to the back of the room, sat down on the floor, leaned against the closet door, and began to read the assignment. While the students read Judith put the following on the board:

1. Describe Betsy and her pet Petunia.
2. Find 2 similes in Chapter 14 (pp. 44, 45).
3. Why do you think Prince Brat wanted to know if Jemmy had lots of friends?
4. How does Prince Brat feel about his adventure with Jemmy?

When students finished reading the chapter, Judith asked them to work in groups to complete the tasks and questions on the board. As his group addressed the tasks and questions, Tony listened and offered suggestions. Later in

the day, Tony participated as his group shared their response orally with the class.

Whole class discussions and small group tasks allowed Judith to assess students' comprehension. Through questioning, she ascertained students' ability to recall specific details or retell the story sequentially. Focusing attention on particular passages, Judith assessed students' understanding of figures of speech or vocabulary and their ability to use reading strategies. Writing and reading response activities provided Judith with similar information about individual students.

One example of a reading response activity occurred several days after the class finished reading *Whipping Boy*. The worksheet, labeled "Response to Literature," stated:

#### RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

THE TITLE IS: \_\_\_\_\_

THE PROBLEM IN THE STORY IS:

THE PROBLEM IS SOLVED WHEN:

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF THE STORY?

THE AUTHOR'S MESSAGE IS:

THE MESSAGE MAKES ME THINK:

DID YOU LIKE THIS STORY? TELL WHY OR WHY NOT.

CHARACTERS:

SETTING:

On a separate sheet of paper Tony began to answer the first question (see Figure 1). He wrote "I think HYN [Hold-Your-Nose] Billy and Cutwater are." Tony did not continue writing. Instead, his answers to the first two questions were written in adult handwriting, possibly Judith's. Based on my observations of several similar situations, I presume Judith sat beside Tony and encouraged him to dictate his answers to the questions. The first answer began by restating the question, "The problem in the story is:"

1. I think that H.Y.N. Billy and  
Cutwater are  
...The problem in the story is Prince Brat. He  
wouldn't listen to his teacher or his father. He was  
always getting into trouble and Jemmy had to take  
his whippings.

2. The problem was solved when the boys ran away  
because Jemmy was not going to get whipped any  
more.

3. ✓

Figure 1. Tony's response to questions about the novel *Whipping Boy*.

From my perspective Judith modeled a structure for answering questions and provided scaffolding for Tony as he formulated his ideas. Tony's answer to the first question changed. Initially he identified Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater as the problem. In the dictated answers Tony said Prince Brat was the problem. Restructuring Tony's initial thoughts implied one correct answer and the presumed inadequacy of his response. The rephrasing may have thwarted his efforts to understand the story and formulate his answer to the question (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

In analyzing Tony's "Response to Literature" I was prompted to ask "Who was in control of the language?" (cf. Searle, 1984). Searle (1984) contends that students' understanding, valuing, and excitement can be negated if they are "led to report the experience in an appropriate form" (p. 481). Searle asks justifiably "whose intentions are being honored?" in such situations. The shift from student-written to dictated form, the change in the specific content of his answer to the first question, and the structure of his dictated answers suggest Tony was not in control of the language.

From Judith's perspective the scaffolding supported Tony's efforts and provided a way for him to feel a part of the classroom community of readers and writers. She explained her thoughts about dictation and scaffolding in a

conversation in July 1994. She stated:

When you scribe for a child you write exactly what they're saying. I assisted him. He worked with me and told me. He was very good at telling creative stories. I worked with him. The best way to thwart his [Tony's] response would have been to not help him at all. This would have made him feel inadequate. [He] would have been uncomfortable with only a half sentence and not being able to complete anything.

Judith assessed Tony's "Response to Literature" and marked his paper with a check minus (See Figure 1). Judith explained that Tony received a check minus "because I strictly dictated what he wanted and there were incorrect responses and because he had not completed the assignment." The "Response to Literature" represented one of the many ways Judith assessed students' reading comprehension.

Assessing literacy-learning: Phoebe the Spy. Judith also often assessed reading comprehension by requiring students to write. During these assessments Tony would be expected, with support, to complete the same assignment as the rest of the class. Tony would typically dictate his answers or story to Judith. As Tony dictated Judith would ask questions or make suggestions to push his thinking and

model appropriate sentence structure or organizational strategies (Goodman & Goodman, 1992).

Early in February 1993 students read Phoebe the Spy, the story of a young African-American girl sent to work in General Washington's home so she could uncover the plot to kill the General. Using her keen observational skills and clever powers of deduction, Phoebe discovered the identity of the would-be assassin. After finishing the novel, Judith asked students to pretend they were Phoebe and write a letter to a friend describing how they saved General Washington's life.

Tony began the letter on his own by writing the heading. He dictated the rest of the four-page body of the letter to Judith. As Tony dictated, Judith asked questions, provided support, and made suggestions. The first page of Tony's rough draft is reproduced in Figure 2 and the first page of Tony's final draft in Figure 3. In completing the assignment, Tony copied every line exactly as it was written on the rough draft.

Comparing Tony's final draft to the dictated rough draft prompted several observations. When Judith began a new line of text Tony began a new line, even though he had space remaining on the previous line. Tony began a new line after the word "wondering" even though there was ample room on the line to continue the sentence.

New York, 1776  
230 West Seventy St.  
Queen's Head Tavern

Dear Nathan,

I just had to write and tell you about a wild adventure that I just had. I was a spy for General Washington! Can you believe it?  
← I guess you are probably wondering how this ~~at~~ happened. So, instead of keeping you in suspense, I'll start from the beginning.

First, I was just helping my father in the tavern when he came over to me and said we needed to have a serious talk.

During this talk he told me that he needed my help. He had heard that someone was planning to kill General Washington and he needed for me to become his spy.

The next day, I went to the Martier House to become General Washington's house-keeper and spy. When I arrived I met

Figure 2.

First page of the draft of Tony's letter describing Phoebe's experiences.



230 West Seventy St,  
Queens Head Tavern

Dear Nathan,

— just had to write and tell  
you about a wild adventure ~~that~~  
I just had. I was a spy for General  
Washington! can you believe it?  
← I guess you are probably  
wondering

Now time happened. So, instead of  
keeping you in suspense I'll start from  
the beginning.  
First, I was just helping my friend in  
the tavern when he came over  
to me and  
said we needed to have a  
serious talk.

Figure 3.

First page of the final draft of Tony's  
letter describing Phoebe's experiences.

Tony copied an arrow Judith used to remind him to move the text to the left margin. The arrow became part of Tony's final text rather than an editing symbol used to correct the rough draft of his letter. The inconsistent spacing between letters in words such as "wondering" and "helping" suggested Tony did not always recognize the words formed by letter groupings.

Judith's efforts to model appropriate sentence structure, the sequencing of ideas, and the organization of sentences into paragraphs were evident throughout the letter. As she sat beside Tony and recorded his letter, Judith's questions and suggestions encouraged him to add more details or think about what happened next. She explained:

I was trying to help him participate in the same way the other students were. I was trying not to draw attention to him by giving him a separate activity. The letter was used instead of a "Response to Literature" and... one of the goals was to assess comprehension. I tried to work that into the document. I gave him every opportunity during class discussion and small group discussion time to reveal and share [his experiences and thoughts].

Like the "Response to Literature," the contents of the

letter, I believe, seemed to reflect an emphasis other than Tony's. In the process of supporting students' learning teachers may inadvertently silence students' voices (Cazden, 1988). Questions asked in search of "right" answers rather than to explore students' thinking, communicate what teachers count as knowledge and evidence of understanding (Cazden, 1988).

Often Tony's literate learning was assessed in terms of right or wrong answers. As Tony and Judith worked together to construct answers to questions about *Whipping Boy* or the letter about Phoebe's adventure, I believe that Judith defined what counted as appropriate performance and evidence of competence. Drawing on what he knew about the content of the books, Tony contributed to the construction of the texts. It appeared to me that Judith was looking for particular answers to questions and a detailed, sequential retelling of the plot. Helping students recall particular answers or structure sentences in an appropriate way does not necessarily help them gain a conceptual understanding of the text (Cazden, 1988). In her effort to support Tony's learning by modeling and scaffolding, Judith built toward right answers and her instructional goals (cf. Searle, 1984).

When looking with me at the letter about Phoebe's adventures several weeks later, Tony described it in general

terms, but could not read what it said. "What's this one about?" I asked spreading the pages of the story out on the table. "Oh that one was about ... Phoebe I think," Tony said. As I finished reading one of the pages aloud he added, "I don't remember none of this...."

It is difficult to determine specific reasons why students do not remember or say they do not remember particular activities or assignments. Judith interpreted Tony's inability to remember the stories he dictated. She explained:

This [is] an example of the concern that we had for his processing and being able to remember things. The tutor that he worked with would tell me that he could not remember from day to day what they had done the day before. How was he supposed to remember three months later when you meet with him in the summer what these things meant to him, if he is that kind of a slow learner?

Although Tony did not complete the student checklist to self-assess his work, Judith assessed his comprehension based on their conversation and the letter he dictated. She summarized her assessment at the bottom of the student checklist (See Figure 4). The letter, Judith concluded, reflected Tony's understanding of the story. With support,

Tony retold the plot, put the events in sequential order, and organized the sentences into paragraphs. Judith's assessment focused on the details Tony remembered and his ability to retell the story sequentially.

STUDENT CHECKLIST

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CONFERENCE DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did I do my best?
2. Did I say what I wanted to say? Stay on the topic?
3. Will my writing be enjoyable for others to read?
4. Did I \_\_\_\_\_?  
skill

*You did a good job of remembering  
the events of the novel.*



Figure 4. Judith's comments on Tony's student checklist.

The *Early Bird Special*, spelling rotations, and instruction focused on novels were a routine part of Judith's language arts program. The language arts activities Judith planned established the structure of her fourth grade class. As a part of the class Tony's literate

abilities were evaluated and he was assessed as "unable to read or write."

#### **Apart from the Class: Focusing Instruction on Skills**

Though a part of Judith's class, some aspects of Tony's instructional and curricular program set him apart from the class. Judith believed in addition to Tony being immersed in the fourth grade curriculum, he needed a skill-oriented curriculum at his instructional level. Tony's individualized instructional and curricular program represented one way he might have been separated from his peers.

Throughout the year, as students in Judith's fourth grade read novels such as *Whipping Boy* and *Phoebe the Spy*, Tony was included in class discussions, expected to listen as others read aloud, and asked to complete instructional and assessment activities. Although immersed in that aspect of the fourth grade curriculum, Tony's instructional program also included individualized activities to reinforce his skills. He was asked to memorize flashcards and complete pages in a phonics workbook called *Explode the Code*. The *Explode the Code* program had been recommended by the school's special education teacher as material used successfully by special education students. "He needs the skills to make up for what he missed by not being in

school," Judith remarked to me during Tony's fourth grade year and again in a follow-up interview in March 1994.

Tony was receiving a lot a personal attention and was being provided support that would allow him to participate on an equal level with his peers. Working with me for ten minutes would often allow him to participate for thirty minutes in a group.

Explode the Code. During fourth grade Tony finished the three beginning levels of the phonics program, *Explode the Code*. She stated that she sought the advice of another teacher because:

[I was] seeking a way to try to meet some of the needs [precipitated by] the fact that he had never been in school. I was seeking help. *Explode the Code* was suggested to me by another teacher. She offered these materials because it was something she felt had worked successfully with other students she had worked with.

The pages in Tony's workbook were assessed with checkmarks, smiley faces, or the word good. Occasionally Judith or someone else working with Tony would write a letter or word above or beside his answer to illustrate correct letter formation (See Figure 5). Judith explained the significance of the corrections and the role of *Explode the Code* in

Tony's instructional program. She stated:

Many times other teachers, teachers' aides, and students worked with him and helped him in correcting his work. The fact that I did allow other people to share in working with *Explode the Code*, even students, shows what sort of priority I had for it. It was a much lower one than being immersed and doing the language activities we were doing as a whole class. It was used when we were doing something that was not appropriate for him and when I needed to work more with the other students in the classroom.

She explained that *Explode the Code* "was something that he [Tony] used, but it was not my major focus."

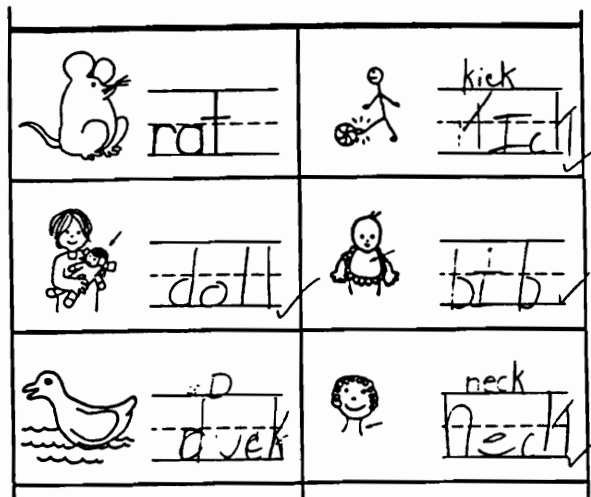


Figure 5. Letter formation corrected by Judith.



On almost every page of his *Explode the Code* workbook Tony corrected his own handwriting. In Figure 6 the lighter letters were written in pencil. Written in magic marker, the darker letters illustrate Tony's emphasis on handwriting and his efforts to self-correct.

Tony explained the self-corrections of his handwriting in a conversation with me in August 1993. He stated:

I just went over it [the letter or word] with a marker. I thought it didn't look right. When I see something that's not right, I just go over it.

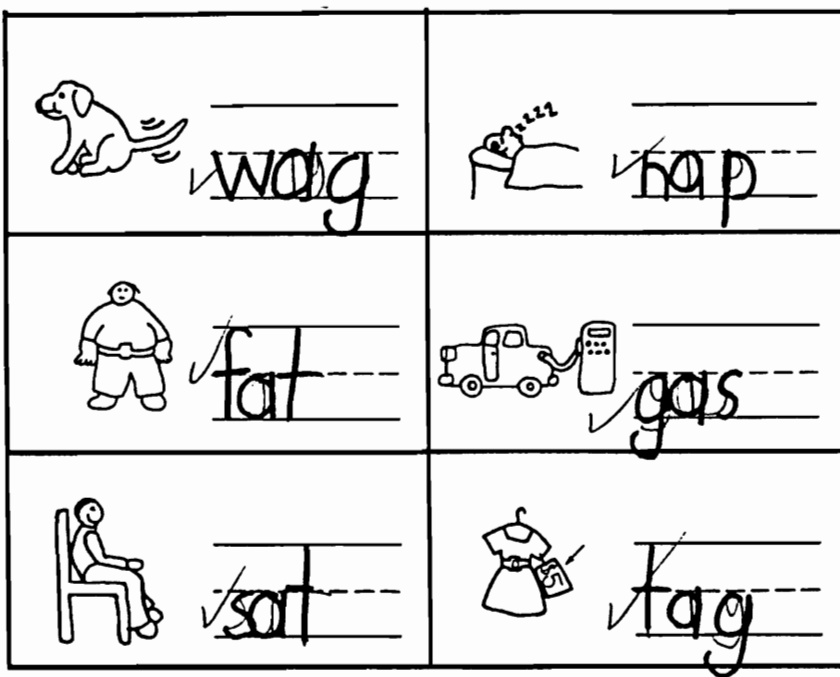


Figure 6. Tony's self-correction of letter formation.

Tony often spoke about his progress in school in terms

of his handwriting. While completing a worksheet in April of his fourth grade year, Tony remarked that:

The only thing that's improving of me is my [hand]writing. [Hand]writing is coming out a little better. I'll show you some writing from last year, when I first came here. That was really horrible!

Tony measured improvement in his handwriting by looking at samples of his work over time and comparing his letter formation to the standard Judith provided. He defined what corrections needed to be made and evaluated his success. Handwriting was an area where Tony had control over his own learning and could assess his own progress.

Judith suggested that Tony's corrections illustrated his improved understanding of the writing process. She stated:

I think that this is the first sign of the fact that he's starting to understand the editing process. He did a lot of these self-correcting things at the end of the year because he had improved on his handwriting and he did feel successful. Beginning readers or writers ... get very enthusiastic and excited about their writing abilities and skills.

In most cases Judith assumed responsibility for

assessing Tony's progress. Judith explained in a conversation in July 1994 that Tony's answers were also corrected by other adults working with him or by other students. Tony's answers in *Explode the Code* were corrected when he wrote jog instead of hop (see Figure 7) or friends instead of pals (see Figure 8). The word Tony wrote was accurately spelled and matched the meaning of the picture though not necessarily the "correct" answer.

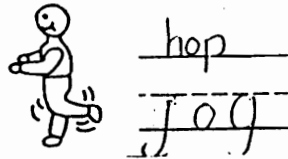


Figure 7. Examples from *Explode the Code*, Book 2.

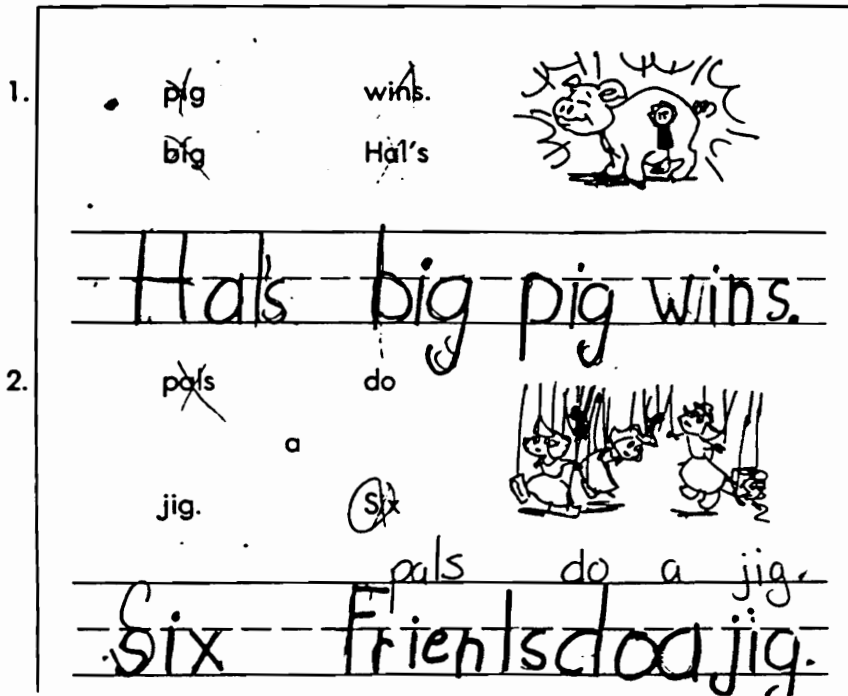


Figure 8. Examples from *Explode the Code*, Book 1 1/2.

Tony's answers in *Explode the Code* revealed much about his thinking. He wrote cop, meaning cup, in Book 1 1/2 (See Figure 9), sters for stairs and senk meaning sink in Book 2 (See Figure 10). Tony used what he knew about beginning and ending sounds to write approximations of the words. In all three cases Tony's answers were marked wrong. Cop (cup) was corrected by writing the word mug beside Tony's answer (See Figure 9). Tony's answer was considered incorrect even though no list of acceptable words was provided on the page. Judith explained that such "lessons were based on repetition and set patterns to establish situations in which the child could be successful."

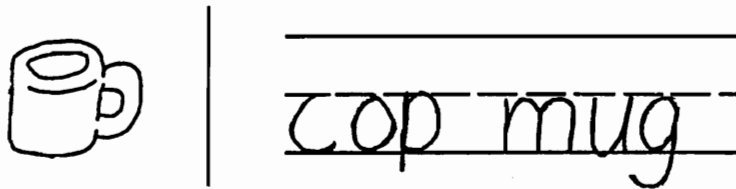


Figure 9. Examples from *Explode the Code*, Book 1 1/2

Match and write: ✓ -

spin	tack	twig	wig	stop
twin	<del>stem</del>	stuck	step	still

---





	step sters		twigs
	stuck seck		wig ✓

Figure 10. Examples from *Explode the Code* Book 2.

Although the answers stairs and sink were consistent with the meaning of the pictures (See Figure 10), the words were not among the choices provided at the top of the page. Judith wrote the correct words, steps and stuck, above Tony's answers. From my perspective Judith's assessment of Tony's efforts implied that selecting the *right* answer was more important than interpreting and understanding the meaning of words.

In a conversation in July 1994, Judith explained how she interacted with Tony in such situations. She stated:

This could have been corrected by somebody else. Maybe I would have seen the consistency of meaning had I corrected it. Also many times we would discuss the consistencies and the meaning. I would say I can see how you were thinking and this is very close to the real answer. Then we talked about why the company chose another answer as the one of choice. I really think it is important for him to be able to understand and follow directions and to be able to use information. In that particular instance the words **were** at the top of the page for him to use. This is a goal that we have for all students, for them to be able to use information that is given to them and to be able to follow directions.

Completing pages in *Explode the Code* books did not help Tony connect print to meaningful forms of communication. The pictures were ambiguous and the text separated from the real world of reading and writing (See Figure 11).






<p>"X" it:</p> <p>The skull slips off the box. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The box has a skull on it. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>The rug is in the plum. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The plum is on the bug. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>The fox slaps the clam. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The fox slams the lid. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>Bill sits on the plum. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Bill sits on the tack. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>The plug is at the club. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The bug hit the tub. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	

Figure 11. Example from *Explode the Code*, Book 2.

Focused on decontextualized skills that were introduced and practiced in isolation, exercises in *Explode the Code* could not adequately challenge or assess Tony's literate abilities (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

*Explode the Code* defined some of Tony's reading and writing experiences in terms of simple sentences with little

connection to the real world of reading and writing (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Taylor, 1990, 1993). Complex sentences such as: My mom said[, ] ["Y]es I can go up [to] my friends house;" "Let me go store[, "] I said to my big drouther; and, Have you ever saw the Neverending story[?] which Tony wrote in his journal at the beginning of the year were replaced in the second half of the year with sentences similar in style and format to those in *Explode the Code*.

He wrote:

1. My Dad bib
  2. I miss the bus
  3. I climb up the hill
  4. My brother turn six
- 
1. My Dad have a doll
  2. you or him
  3. by by Mama
  4. My brother is one yers old
  5. My Dad got a yellow had

Sentences written later in the year included no dialogue, followed a simple subject-verb pattern, and did not demonstrate the variations in content exhibited earlier in the year. Tony's exposure to written language in the format presented in *Explode the Code* suggested he may have felt

they were worth emulating in form and substance.

Judith provided a different perspective and explanation of the reasons for sentences being different. She stated:

There are several possibilities here. Many times others dictated for him. There were workers and people who were in the house who assisted him in his journal writing sometimes. Those long sentences may have been dictated by somebody else or somebody else may have written them down and he may have recopied them. The tutor told me that ... so he could have his thoughts expressed, others would write for him. Also he may have seen the home journal as homework and he may have responded the way some students respond [which] is to write quickly and as minimally as possible. He may have seen the *Explode the Code* as a vehicle to do that. It also could have represented his true level at the time which was as a beginning reader. As a beginning reader is this so unacceptable?

Alphabetical Order. In early April 1993, I sat beside Tony as he completed a worksheet that required him to alphabetize sets of five words to the fourth letter. One box, for example contained the words fellow, first, fast, funny, and foot. Without contextual clues Tony was unable to read most of the words. With support, Tony was able to



put several sets of the words in alphabetical order. Repeating the alphabet quietly to himself as he worked, Tony focused on similarities and differences in letter sequences. After he had worked for almost an hour and completed less than half the page, I suggested Tony leave the rest of the page for another day.

"How about if you do this last one and you leave the rest," I suggested. "I'll bet Mrs. Samuelson would be pleased to see you've gotten these four done correctly."

Tony refused. "She wants **everybody** to do all of them," he said emphatically. He summarized his feelings about the assignment by saying, "This is hard."

Judith believed Tony's desire to complete the alphabetizing worksheet indicated how much he felt a part of the classroom group. She stated:

He felt accountable to me and he felt that he needed to be participating. In my mind that means he felt a part and he was a regular student in my classroom. The fact was he felt accountable and I don't think that's such a bad thing. He did feel that I had expectations for him.

From my perspective alphabetizing the sets of words separated the skill from its meaning and usefulness in real life (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Taylor, 1990, 1993).

Tony worked to complete the assignment even though he did not know many of the words and had to say his alphabet over and over again to himself. The assignment focused on the mechanics of literacy-learning rather than the use of print to communicate in meaningful ways. The assignment was based on the assumption that skills taught in isolation could be transferred or used in real-life situations.

Judith perceived the meaning and importance of the alphabetical order activity differently. "I certainly do hope that he can use alphabetical order so that he can look up somebody's phone number in a phone book or use the dictionary to find a word," she explained. "I hope that alphabetical order can be of use in his real life."

Tony's literacy-learning in Judith's class focused on literacy tools, such as the mechanics of spelling, grammar, and punctuation, rather than the construction of meaning (Heath & Mangiola, 1991). Learning to read and write required practice with and mastery of a hierarchical sequence of tasks (Chall, 1983) rather than opportunities to engage with print in authentic ways. Narrowly defined by *Explode the Code* and flashcards, Tony's individualized curriculum was decontextualized and skill-oriented.

Judith described *Explode the Code* as a small portion of his day. Explaining his program she noted:

He engaged with print in authentic ways for the purpose of constructing meaning. This happened every time Tony and his classmates were asked to reflect on how they felt about characters and situations from novels, as well as making comparisons to their own lives. This is one example of the ways literature was made authentic for children by allowing them to internalize the information in their own way.

Immersing Tony in the group and letting him listen was not enough, Judith suggested. "The basic skills introduced in fourth grade were different than the basic skills Tony needed as a beginning reader and writer." The *Explode the Code* books and having someone work with Tony individually, Judith stated, "would fill in the gaps that would not be filled at the level at which he was immersed" (cf. McDermott, 1978; Gumperz, 1970). How Tony performed in relation to skills became one measure of his success as a reader and writer (Chall, 1983; Taylor, 1991, 1993).

I observed in Judith's class six full days during the second semester of 1992-93 school year and for an hour or two on several other occasions. Each time Tony looked busy as the class completed the *Early Bird Special* and the spelling or language rotations. He sharpened his pencil, went to the restroom, got a drink or walked across the room

to talk with friends. At his own desk he moved papers from one folder to another, hunted for his ruler, reorganized his books, fixed his stapler, or removed paper from his notebook. In doing assignments he wrote, erased, wadded up his paper and threw it away, or put everything in his desk unfinished. He accomplished most of these activities without disrupting Judith or the other students and without attracting attention to himself.

Though immersed in the fourth grade environment and included in many of the language arts activities, I believe Tony was on the periphery of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991) of readers and writers in Judith's class. In a conversation with me in March 1993, Tony shared his perceptions of his involvement in the class.

Tony: Sometimes she [Judith] will let me work with them [rest of the class] if they are doing something like working on a map or spelling words or working in groups. My friends will help me spell the word I don't know so I don't have to go back to my desk.

Pam: When you were in class did you listen while they [class] read stories?

Tony: I listened. If I didn't she'd [Judith] have to start all over again. Sometimes I'd be

able to listen. Sometimes I'd be finishing that [*Explode the Code*].

Judith believed Tony's statements show that he felt he was a part of the class and that he worked to meet her expectations. His comments, she noted, show that "he felt accountable. He felt that he needed to listen."

Tony moved in and out of the group of readers and writers in his classroom. Sometimes he was completely involved in the discussion of chapters of the novel he had listened to other students read. At other times he completed different activities and focused on different skills while the reading and writing activities of the rest of the class continued. Judith suggested that Tony's position on "the periphery was only because of the situation that he had been put into by not having been in school. He did feel accepted and included by me and his peers. The kids were always pulling for him and reading for him." From my perspective he was a part of the group yet apart.

#### **Mandated Assessments: Grades and Standardized Tests**

Tony's report card grades and his portfolio of work were similar to other fourth graders. Tony's experiences with district or state mandated tests, however, were vastly different from others in his class. Examining Tony's

grades, portfolio, and experience with standardized tests, I make visible the often invisible aspects of assessment practices and continue to explore how the assessment of Tony as "unable to read or write" occurred.

### Report Card Grades

Beginning with the 1990-91 school year, Thurber Intermediate School abandoned traditional letter grades. Initially they used the phrases: Demonstrates Competency (DC), Developing Understanding (DU), and Needs Help (NH) to describe student progress. Faced with confusion over meaning and complaints from parents, the administration and faculty changed the descriptors at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year to: Mastery (M), Trying (T), and Needs Assistance (N). A narrative describing ongoing units of study and specific information about class activities was sent to parents each nine weeks along with the report card.

After he received his report card for the third nine-weeks in early April 1993, Tony and I talked about his grades. "I got my report card yesterday," Tony said as we sat in the teachers' workroom and he completed an assignment Judith had given him.

"Oh, yeah," I responded. "How did you do?"

"I did okay. M means you mastered."

"What does that mean, mastered?" I asked.

"Like you mastered the possibilities," he explained referring to the commercials for Mastercard. "Say if I'm good at this, I mastered it."

"So it means you do it really well," I said.

"Uh huh. I think I got about 20, 20 M's. And N means you need help."

"Did you get any of those?" I asked.

"Uh huh. And T ... T means ... I forgot what the T means. I gave the thing to my teacher. My mom forgot to sign it."

"Did you get some T's too?" I inquired.

"Uh huh. I got a lot of T's. The whole paper's full of T's. I think [there were] a little more of M's, I mean N's and T's. I think there was around 30, 30 N's and 30 T's."

Tony's grades on his report card at the end of each six-weeks marking period were similar to those recorded in his cumulative folder at the end of his fourth grade year. Juxtapositioning the conversation Tony and I had and the grades suggested that he did not understand what the letters meant in relation to his own learning. The grades on Tony's report card did not communicate his specific strengths or particular content learned.

NAME:	Tony Mitchell
Reading	N
English	N
Spelling	T
Writing	N
Arithmetic	N
Social Studies	N
Science	N
Art	T
Music	T
Health/PE	T/T

The format of the report card did not specify how much or what kind of assistance was needed to support Tony's learning or the standards to which his work was compared. Without narrative comments, the report card did not adequately describe Tony's performance. Without further explanation it was impossible to determine if Tony was "trying" despite "needing help." Tony's report card implied that his academic difficulties were attributable to his lack of skills or unwillingness to try.

Judith explained that teachers and administrators at Thurber had "worked very hard to make it clear to parents and students that N is not meant to be equated with not trying. It simply meant that he needs help." In describing



the thought behind particular grades recorded in Tony's cumulative record she noted:

Aaron assist me with these [grades]. We were concerned that he might transfer to another school and this [his grades] would have to be reflective. I gave as many M's as possible. What is a report card designed to do? Is it designed to examine the appropriateness of instruction? There were specific areas that he lacked. That's what a report card is designed to show. It's not only the lack of skills but also the strengths and I tried do that when I could on the report card.

Like the report card, the portfolio of Tony's fourth grade work provided only a limited view of his literate abilities. It included three *Explode the Code* workbooks and two sheets of paper on which Tony had copied the preamble to the Constitution in his neatest handwriting. Also included were the letter about Phoebe's adventure and four additional dictated stories as well as a computer disk. Although labeled "Tony's journal," the disk was empty. Judith explained that at that point (the end of the 1992-93 school year) "there was not much stress given to our portfolios." She noted:

We were just in the beginning stages and realized it

[the portfolio] provided a limited view of [students'] literate abilities. We had sort of a listing of things we were to include. It was just a few stories. It wasn't a big thing.

A copy of the preamble to the Constitution, completed workbooks, and copies of dictated texts told me little about Tony's ability to use print to solve problems, organize his thoughts, or communicate with others. Tony's comment that "I don't remember none of this stuff" as he looked at the portfolio during the summer after fourth grade suggested the collection of work told Tony little about himself as a literate-learner (See Taylor, 1990, 1993).

### Standardized Tests

District and state mandated tests also played a role in assessments of Tony as a "non-reader and non-writer." To many parents, community leaders and education policymakers, standardized test scores measure the success of teachers and students. Standardized tests influenced the content and format of Judith's teaching as well as how she used time. Tony's experiences during administration of tests mandated for fourth grade further separated him from his peers and reinforced perceptions of him as a student outside the classroom's literate community.

As testing dates approached Judith focused more

arduously on the content associated with the standardized tests her students were required to take as fourth graders (cf. Darling-Hammond, 1991; Dorr-Bemme & Herman, 1986; Herman, Dreyfus, & Golan, 1990; Smith et al., 1991) and spent less time on parts of the curriculum not covered by the tests (cf. Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). The amount of time she felt she needed to devote to test preparation and administration frustrated Judith (cf. Winograd, Paris, and Bridge, 1991; Smith et. al., 1991). "There never seems to be enough time to cover everything they're supposed to know," she commented just before administering the IOWA Test of Basic Skills in early March 1993.

Judith and the other fourth grade teacher at Thurber frequently complained that their students were "tested to death." Fourth grade students took two state-mandated assessments each year, the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) in February and IOWA Test of Basic Skills in March, and the district-mandated Survey of Basic Skills (SBS) achievement test in early May. Though principal Aaron Jones did not use standardized test scores to place students or evaluate teacher performance, Judith felt responsible for "teaching students what they needed to know for the tests."

Many of the language arts activities in Judith's class focused on elements of the writing process (e.g., organizing ideas, writing, revising, and editing) in preparation for

the writing portion of the LPT. Failure to pass the LPT assessment by the time a student reaches high school prevents him or her from participating in athletics or other extracurricular activities and may ultimately delay or deny graduation. The high stakes associated with the LPT were reflected in the amount of class time devoted to preparation for the test.

Although considered practice in preparation for the sixth grade LPT, the fourth and fifth grade LPT was not without negative consequences (cf. Herman, Dreyfus, & Golan, 1990; Smith et al., 1991). Teachers were expected to teach material the test covered. Students were urged to do their best and elementary schools in the district were compared based on the percentage of students earning passing scores on the LPT. A list of the number of students in each elementary school not passing the LPT practice test was readily available to parents and the community. The performance of the students at Thurber was a source of pride. Principal Aaron Jones announced to parents and visitors to the school that only one fourth grade student had failed to pass the Literacy Passport Test during the 1991-92 school year.

As dates for administrating the IOWA and SBS achievement tests approached, Judith assigned worksheets during language arts and spelling rotations. To familiarize

students with the content and format of the standardized tests, Judith copied pages from *Test Best*, a test preparation program published by Steck-Vaughn (cf. Smith et al., 1991). One five-page packet of worksheets consisted of several reading passages each followed by four recall and comprehension questions. Tony was given copies of the worksheets but did not complete the assignments. He listened but did not participate as the class discussed the questions and answers. Often he drew pictures or worked in his phonics workbook, *Explode the Code*, while the rest of the class completed test preparation assignments.

Tony did not take the three standardized assessments (LPT, IOWA, SBS) administered during the spring of the 1992-93 school year with the rest of Judith's class. Judith described the decision not to test Tony as one she and principal Aaron Jones made jointly. "I approached Aaron and said 'no way,'" she explained. "Aaron said, 'He [Tony] doesn't need to take it [standardized test].'" The decision not to test Tony suggested they believed the tests would be too difficult and too frustrating for him.

Difficulty and frustration were perhaps not the only reasons Tony was not tested with the rest of the fourth grade. In a conversation with the two fourth grade teachers just prior to the Literacy Passport Test in February, I asked what happened to students like Tony during testing.

"I think students like Tony just *disappear* from our rolls on test days," one suggested.

"They would bring our scores down," the other added. Both teachers' comments implied that their concern focused not only on Tony, but on what his scores would do to the class and school averages (cf. Darling-Hammond, 1991; Korte, 1988; Shephard & Smith, 1988; Smith & Shephard, 1988).

During the Literacy Passport Test in February 1993, desks were separated and all students were required to remain in their seats. While other students organized their thoughts and completed drafts based on the assigned writing prompt, Tony completed pages in his *Explode the Code* workbook, flipped through his flashcards or drew pictures on notebook paper. At one point Judith sat beside him and assessed the pages he had completed in *Explode the Code*. During the two and a half hours students worked on the Literacy Passport Test in the morning and another hour after lunch, Tony sat quietly in his seat.

In March and April 1993 when the rest of the class took the IOWA test of Basic Skills and the Survey of Basic Skills (SBS) test, Judith made arrangements for Tony to leave the classroom, either to work with me or to play games on the computer in the Chapter One room. At the time Tony's only comment about having to leave the room was "wish I didn't

have to." Weeks later as Tony and I reread stories he had written with me, Tony verbalized his feelings about having to leave the classroom while his classmates took the test. "What's this one?" I asked looking at one of the stories he had dictated.

Tony whispered the words to himself before saying them aloud. "My day in school," he read.

"That's very close," I said. "My day in ....?"

"class," Tony replied.

"Right. Do you remember what the class was doing?"

"Let's see. Oh yeah - going to PE," Tony speculated.

"No. There was a test. That really got me mad. Well, I don't blame her."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, throwing me out of class," Tony explained. "Not really throwing me out but taking me out. Because you never know I might make noise." Tony did not understand why he had been asked to leave the class during the test. He believed he was asked to leave because he might do something wrong.

After reading Tony's comments about being asked to leave the room during testing Judith noted that she "would not have sent him out of the room with out speaking to him about why." Tony's inability to remember the explanation provide, she believed, further evidence of his processing

difficulties. She stated:

Again I think that it's in his [ability] to remember about things that had happened that this was lost. This is consistent with what the tutor said. She said that he could not recall things from day to day from what was done or said the day before. I hope that he has grown or changed in that way. I hope that might have happened.

The testing situation represented another way Tony was identified as different and set apart from others in his class. Ironically, though Tony did not take the LPT, IOWA or the SBS with his class, the SBS and eight other assessments were administered to him individually as part of his psychological evaluation for special education during the last weeks of the 1992-93 school year.

### **Seeking Help**

In my opinion, the words "he doesn't know how to read or write" do not describe something Tony is or was. They are, instead, an assessment of Tony in a specific context - his fourth grade classroom. Assessments of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer were related to the nature of the teacher's instructional expectations and interactions, the shape of the literate curriculum, and the institutional



constraints. Judith's assessment of Tony defined his access and opportunities to participate in the classroom community of readers and writers. The assessment of Tony's literate ability had important consequences for his educational future.

In terms of what Judith expected of a literate fourth grade student, Tony was unsuccessful, unable to read or write. "He was becoming more literate," Judith noted in a interview in July 1994. She explained the difficulty she experienced in documenting Tony's growth:

Other than through comments on the report card or actual pieces of work ... it was difficult to show the system where those gains were made. Even the special testing posed a difficulty in assessing this particular child's needs or strengths. A true assessment could not be met within this situation. (original emphasis)

Midway through the first semester of the 1992-93 school year, she sought help. Judith asked the Chapter One teacher to include Tony in remedial work she did with other students. In April 1993, Judith referred Tony for special education evaluation. Judith explained her decision by saying, "I was doing the best that I could and I was seeking help from others in the school." Judith believed Tony's situation was difficult and required teachers to invest

additional time and effort.

Judith explained further that she was not the only one who had concerns about him. "We think in addition to not having been in school prior to this year he has a learning disability," she explained during lunch one day in mid-March. "Maybe if the problem could be identified we [school personnel] would be able to get Tony some special help." The goal Judith insisted was "to seek assistance and to help him in any way that we possibly could." Judith believed special education placement was one way Tony would be able to get additional assistance in school. By referring Tony, Judith initiated the special education evaluation cycle (i.e., referral, evaluation, eligibility, IEP and placement, instructional plan, and annual review) (Anderson, Chitwood, & Hayden, 1990). During the last month of the 1992-93 school year, Tony was given nine tests to determine his ability and eligibility for special services.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATION:

#### STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENTS OF TONY

Through all my experiences with people struggling to learn, the one thing that strikes me most is the ease with which we misperceive failed performance.

Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary*

Judith Samuelson initiated the special education evaluation of Tony Mitchell by completing the *Referral to the Child Study Committee* and the *Behavior Evaluation Scale*. "Tony," Judith acknowledged, "is not a behavior problem." Her concerns centered around his difficulty with schoolwork. She noted, "Tony is often off task and requires excessive assistance from adults." A Confidential Category II file was established to hold all documents related to Tony's special education evaluation. Duplicate files were maintained in the office at Thurber and in the special education office at the district administration building. With the exception of a sociocultural assessment, all components of the special education evaluation were completed during the final weeks of the 1992-93 school year. Reports on observations and test results were filed in June and July 1993.

In this chapter I examine Tony's experience in the special education evaluation process. I analyze the

assessment summaries written by school personnel for inclusion in Tony's Confidential Category II file. I consider the implied meanings of the texts and note contextual details overlooked in evaluating Tony. I explore in detail how the special education process defined Tony's abilities as borderline.

### **Evaluation for Special Education Services**

Following Tony's referral for special education evaluation in early April 1993, a Child Study Committee composed of teachers was established to examine his records and make recommendations for further action. Based on their review of his grades, cumulative record, class work, and teacher's observations, the committee drew conclusions and constructed a report. The report stated:

Tony came to Thurber last year at age 11 as a nonreader. He will be twelve this month (April, 1993). He articulates very well. He has poor visual memory, still reverses letters and words.... He is currently in fourth grade. He receives Chapter I help, individualized instruction, and has individual tutors. [He] understands and comprehends what is read to him.

The committee concluded there was sufficient evidence "to indicate that this student (Tony) may be handicapped" and

recommended that he "be referred for an individual evaluation." They suggested a "full formal assessment," noting that Tony would need "non-reading tests."

Following the Child Study meeting a letter notified the Mitchells of the committee's recommendation that Tony be tested "to determine whether or not he has a handicapping educational condition." In mid-April 1993, Mrs. Mitchell met with principal Aaron Jones and the school psychologist. Aaron explained that the special education evaluation would help school personnel identify ways they could support Tony's learning. Special education procedures required parental notification and consent prior to formal evaluation. The school psychologist reviewed the special education *Prior Notice and Consent* form for Mrs. Mitchell. It stated in part:

The purpose of this assessment is to provide information on which to establish your child's intellectual and personal functioning; to determine whether or not a handicapping condition exists; to determine whether educational intervention is needed; and to provide the basis for appropriate programming.

Formal evaluation, the psychologist explained to Mrs. Mitchell, would include assessments in the four areas described on the *Prior Notice and Consent* form:

EDUCATIONAL/DEVELOPMENTAL - To evaluate you child's current educational performance. Tests will include individual achievement and other diagnostic tests in academic skill areas and language performance tests. These will identify instructional strengths and weaknesses.

PSYCHOLOGICAL - To evaluate your child's ability level and any psychological factors which may interfere with learning. An approved psychologist will submit a written evaluation report based on a battery of tests which will include an individual intelligence test.

SOCIOCULTURAL - To understand your child's background and adaptive behavior in home and school. A parent interview will take place and a social behavior checklist will be completed by a qualified visiting teacher/social worker.

MEDICAL - To determine whether or not suspected problems are of a medical nature and can be resolved through medical treatment or consultation. A written report... indicating... any medical/health problems which impede optimal learning will be obtained.

Following the explanation provided by Aaron and the psychologist, Mrs. Mitchell signed the form giving the school permission to formally evaluate Tony to determine his eligibility for special education services.

Formal evaluation of Tony began in mid-May 1993 with a observation completed by the school's guidance counselor. Using the *Classroom Observation Checklist* (See Figure 12) required by the district's special education office, the guidance counselor identified a list of behaviors as occurring: never, seldom, frequently, or not observed. Based on her twenty-minute observation in Judith's class, the counselor summarized Tony's behavior. She stated:

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade 4

Date 5-18-93 D.O.B. \_\_\_\_\_ Activity Observed Math

Length of Observation 20 mins

	NEVER	SELDOM	FREQUENTLY	ALMOST ALWAYS
<b>BEHAVIOR</b>				
1. is attentive	✓			
2. is disruptive	✓			
3. is cooperative	<u>not observed</u>			
4. is enthusiastic	✓			
5. is impulsive	✓			
6. is fearful	<u>not observed</u>			
7. interacts with peers			✓	
8. pays attention to task	✓			
9. shows ability to complete work	<u>not observed</u>			
10. seeks attention	✓			
11. is distracted			✓	
12. exhibits acceptable behavior			✓	
<b>ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</b>				
1. has good receptive vocabulary			✓	
2. has good expressive vocabulary	<u>not observed</u>			
3. is able to follow directions			✓	
4. uses time well		✓		
5. has acceptable writing skills	<u>not observed</u>			
6. contributes to class discussion	<u>not observed</u>			
7. appears to have adequate recall	<u>not observed</u>			
8. appears to have difficulty in learning	<u>not observed</u>			
<b>PHYSICAL FEATURES</b>				
1. has good fine motor coordination			✓	
2. has good gross motor coordination	<u>not observed</u>			
3. has possible visual impairment (wears glasses) (Went. not active time)	✓			
4. has possible auditory impairment				

Figure 12. Completed observational checklist.

During instruction Tony never copied down the problems while Ms. Samuelson worked them out on the board. He did not have a book and was just sitting when students were working independently. Ms. Samuelson asked, "Where is your spelling book?" Tony got it out and within seconds he was interacting with peers and playing with a pencil sharpener.

At the end of the 1992-93 school year the *Classroom Observational Checklist* and the guidance counselor's summary became part of Tony's Confidential Category II file.

Neither the checklist nor the summary considered Tony's observed behavior in the context of Judith's classroom or his instructional and curricular program. Tony was described by the guidance counselor as inattentive to the math lesson Judith was teaching. The observer either did not know or did not document Tony's placement in second grade math rather than in the fourth grade book used by the rest of his class. Tony's math assignments did not correspond directly to what Judith taught the rest of the class, but rather to work he was to do independently in his second grade workbook.

The *Classroom Observation Checklist* focused on what Tony did not do in a particular situation. Separating Tony's behavior from his instructional experiences and



interactions in his fourth grade classroom, the checklist and narrative summary implied that the behaviors seen during a brief observation were representative of Tony's actions over time. The limited view of Tony's strengths and abilities presented in the *Classroom Observational Checklist* and narrative summary were reinforced by the educational and developmental assessments of Tony.

### Educational/Developmental Assessments

Educational and developmental evaluation of Tony's performance included two achievement tests: the Survey of Basic Skills (SBS) and the Woodcock-Johnson. Itinerant reading specialist Angela Williams gave Tony the Survey of Basic Skills (SBS) test in late May 1993. The test was administered to Tony individually just three weeks after it was given to the entire fourth grade (See Chapter Two for a more detailed explanation of why Tony did not take the SBS test with other fourth grade students). Typically at Thurber and other schools in the district the subtests were given over several days. Tony was asked to complete the eleven subtests in two days. Results of the test were recorded on the *Student Multi-Reference Report* and included in Tony's Confidential Category II file (See Appendix C).

In addition to scores on individual subtests and composite results, the *Multi-Reference Report* included a

narrative summary for parents. It stated:

Your son took the survey of basic skills in May. This test measured his achievement in skill areas which are important to learn. This test reflected content normally presented to students in grades 3 - 7. How did your son compare to other fourth grade students in the nation? His performance in vocabulary, for example, indicates a national percentile rank of 1. This means that he scored higher than 1 percent of the students tested in vocabulary while 99 percent scored as well or better. He ranked below the average range in all skill areas tested.

How accurate is this assessment? It is important to note that standardized testing is only one way to measure your son's achievement. In order to have a more complete assessment, please feel free to contact his school.

The reading specialist administered the Woodcock-Johnson achievement test during the first week of June 1993. A wide-ranging comprehensive set of individually administered tests, the Woodcock-Johnson was designed to measure cognitive abilities, scholastic aptitudes, and achievement. Tony's performance on the Woodcock-Johnson, the reading specialist suggested, was consistent with his

scores on the SBS achievement test. She identified math as Tony's area of strength and reading and written expression as his weakest areas. Results of the Woodcock-Johnson were documented in a report entitled *Educational Assessment* and included in Tony's confidential Category II file.

Results of the Survey of Basic Skills and the Woodcock-Johnson reduced Tony's literate abilities to a set of numbers and compared his performance to nationally established norms. Neither assessment examined how Tony approached a problem or how he made sense of new information and discrepant events. What Tony could do with the support of human or technological resources was not assessed. The limitations of standardized tests were also evident in the psychological assessments administered as part of the special education evaluation process.

#### Psychological Assessments

In late May 1993 seven tests were administered by school psychologist Paula Fletcher to evaluate Tony's ability level and identify any psychological factors which might interfere with his learning. This battery of tests included: Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Third Edition (WISC-III), Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (TONI), Bender Gestalt, Visual Aural Digit Span Test, House-Tree-Person, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised (PPVT),

and Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement. Paula's report summarizing the test results and her recommendations was added to Tony's Confidential Category II file (See Appendix C for the quantitative summary and a complete copy of the psychologist's confidential report). It stated in part:

#### **CONFIDENTIAL REPORT**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Tony is a twelve year old fourth grader at Thurber Intermediate School.

**RESULTS AND IMPRESSIONS** - Cognitively, Tony appears to be functioning within the borderline range of overall ability according to the WISC-III. His Full Scale IQ [intelligence quotient] of 75 reflects the 5th percentile by normative comparison. According to this assessment Tony demonstrates a mental age of approximately 9 years.

Another measure of intelligence was administered. The TONI is a language free measure of mental ability. The TONI relies on nonverbal problem solving skill. Tony's responses earned him a TONI quotient of 74, which reflects the 4th percentile and the borderline range. This estimate is quite consistent with the scores of the WISC-III.

Tony's responses to the PPVT-R suggest receptive language skills in the borderline range. His standard score of 78 reflects the 7th percentile by normative comparison. This indicates an understanding of the spoken world at an 8 year 11 month level.

Tony's visual motor skills reflect the 6-0 to 6-5 year range. His 8 scoreable errors (Koppitz) indicate difficulty with rotation of design part, distortion of angle and dot, and preservation of design. He also demonstrates difficulty with appropriate integration of design parts to form the whole figure. This performance reveals significant perceptual motor delay. Tony's short term memory skills are at a 7-6 to 7-11 year range.

Educationally, Tony is performing at a late first grade level overall. Math appears to be his strongest area. He does math computation at a late 2nd grade level and math application at a mid 2nd grade level. Tony's reading and spelling skills appear to be at a mid-first grade skill level. He appears restricted to letter identification and a limited sight word vocabulary.

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS** - At this, the conclusion of Tony's one year of formal education, he is achieving at a first to second grade level.

Tony will obviously need supplemental assistance to make academic gains. He needs to learn to read from the beginning, with basic phonetic rules being explained and practiced. Tutoring and any other resources available may be beneficial. Tony's and school staff's expectation need to be realistic to reduce frustration on all sides. Tony may further benefit from interaction with the school's guidance counselor regarding self-esteem issues and expectations. Summer school may also be a good opportunity for Tony to continue building on the acquisitions he has made this year.

The confidential report and quantitative results of the psychological testing were added to Tony's Confidential Category II file.

The psychologist's Confidential Report did not examine the effects of the testing environment or the time frame during which the tests were administered. The report mentioned the circumstances of the testing situation only briefly. It stated:

Tony was polite and courteous during both sessions of this evaluation. He appeared initially quite nervous

about his change in his daily routine. With time and familiarity, he was observably more at ease. His tendency to respond quickly and to giggle decreased as he performed test items successfully. Tony related that he "really can't read" and that he learned his numbers "out of books with Mom."

The report did not acknowledge that Tony had not met the psychologist prior to the first day of the testing. Nor did the psychologist note that Tony had no experience with standardized tests of any kind before the special education evaluation process began.

In addition to concerns about the testing environment, the time frame of the evaluation procedure precipitated several questions. A total of nine standardized assessments were administered during the last four weeks of the 1992-93 school year. While other students focused on end-of-the-year activities, Tony was removed from his classroom, placed in unfamiliar settings, given tests by individuals he had not met before, and expected to perform (cf. Taylor 1990, 1991, 1993). Neither the possible adverse effects of the testing environment nor the impact of extensive testing in a relatively short time frame were addressed in the psychologist's report.

Providing little descriptive information about the

tests, the psychologist's report did not question the narrow, limited domain of skills assessed. Neither did the report address the lack of authentic activities or measures of skills in real-world tasks used in assessing Tony's ability. The assessment of Tony's ability as "borderline" ignored his achievement in culturally meaningful settings and evaluated instead how well he performed on the kind of tests given (Kornharber, Krechevsky, & Gardner, 1990). In describing Tony's performance on the WISC-III, the report stated:

His [Tony's] Verbal IQ of 76 relies on language processing and to some degree exposure to and retention of factual material. Tony's lack of exposure to same may have affected this estimate.

The report did not challenge the appropriateness of the school-oriented questions used to assess Tony's ability. Tony's capabilities were assessed based on his ability to reproduce the *right* answers to decontextualized questions. Instead of providing examples of what Tony could do, the psychologist suggested that Tony and school personnel should lower their expectations to be more consistent with his limited, or "borderline," abilities. The report focused on presumed deficits and suggested Tony's lack of school experiences as a possible explanation for his performance.

## Special Education Evaluation: A Snapshot of Tony's Ability

Judith's referral and the recommendations of the Child Study Committee established the lens through which school personnel assessed Tony. Framed in terms of identifying a handicapping condition, the special education inquiry was narrowed to a question of what was wrong with Tony (McDermott, 1992). When assessments focused on what Tony could not do, support for a deficit was found everywhere. Identifying a "problem," testing to determine specific deficits, and labeling Tony's ability as "borderline" placed the onus of cause on Tony (Mehan, 1992; McDermott, 1992; Poplin, 1988a; Taylor, 1991, 1993).

Tony's case was not atypical. Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihlis (1986) suggest teacher referral and psychological testing focus attention on deficits. Drawing on their research on the educational histories of handicapped students, they posit:

School psychologists administered tests until they located the disabilities that teachers had indicated by their original referral. When they "found" verification of the referral reasons, they did not continue to administer educational tests in order to find discrepancies in the original formulation of the student; they just stopped testing. If the first set



of tests did not uncover the disability suggested by the classroom teacher, then the school psychologist initiated a search procedure to find this hidden disability (p.101)

Procedures and instruments used to assess Tony focused on finding and substantiating the existence of a handicapping condition. Reports by itinerant reading specialist Angela Williams and psychologist Paula Fletcher emphasized the consistency of the test scores. The results of one test were used to validate the findings of other assessments and to build support for labeling Tony's abilities as "borderline." Little effort was made to uncover discrepancies in assessments of Tony's ability, to contextualize assessments, or to focus on what Tony could do in real-life situations. Instead, responsibility for the presumed problem was placed squarely on Tony's shoulders.

Tony's needs as an emergent reader and writer posed a problem for school personnel in the context of his fourth grade classroom. Based on his review of procedures for diagnosing learning disabilities Gerald Coles (1978) suggests that by positing biological or psychological bases for learning difficulties, "the responsibility for failure is taken from the schools, communities, and other institutions and is put squarely on the back, or rather

within the head, of the child" (p. 333). He states:

[The labelling or classification of students] plays its political role, moving the focus away from the general educational process, away from the need to change institutions, away from the need to rectify social conditions affecting the child ... to the remedy of a purely medical problem. (Coles, 1978, p. 333)

Blaming Tony when learning didn't occur in ways the school or teacher expected, the special education evaluation process searched for "glitches in the child's neurological makeup" so that the school and teacher could "be exonerated if and when the child 'fails'." (Taylor, 1993). Special education assessment focused on what was wrong with Tony and ignored what he was capable of accomplishing with support in authentic situations.

Scribner (1984) notes that students' literacy skills and problem-solving abilities are far more complex than present educational systems indicate. Too often the capabilities of children are underestimated and their skills devalued (Taylor 1990, 1991, 1993). Educators are systematically blinded from seeing students' strengths and potentials by the superficial and artificial ways used to measure intelligence and ability (Mehan, 1992; Taylor, 1993). In the context of the special education evaluation

process Tony's abilities were defined as "borderline." Identifying skill deficits and labeling the disability, located the problem "beneath the skin and between the ears" (Mehan, 1992, p.241) of an individual child. Placing the problem inside Tony ignored the contexts in which he was expected to perform and what he was capable of doing in supportive environments.

To understand Tony's literate abilities it was essential to look beyond the snapshot of his performance on decontextualized tasks at one moment in time provided by the special education evaluation. It was important to document Tony's performance as he interacted with human and technological resources in real-life situations. It was essential to observe how he used print and solved problems in his everyday life. More inclusive and detailed than a snapshot, my work with Tony from December 1992 to December 1993 provided a window into his literate learning.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ASSESSING WHAT TONY CAN DO: PROFILE OF A LITERATE LEARNER

We can begin by observing children, learning with them and from them as they learn with us and from us.... To evaluate we need to build descriptions of children as they participate in the social construction of their own environments. The ways in which we develop explanations should be imaginative and intuitive, as well as analytic and well trained.

Denny Taylor, *From the Child's Point of View*

I had observed at Thurber Intermediate School for several weeks as part of the collaborative research project before I met Tony Mitchell. One Wednesday I offered to teach his fourth grade class while Judith Samuelson conferenced with individual students. I was to have the class read and discuss a chapter in the novel, Guns for General Washington. The book described Colonel Henry Knox's efforts to move 183 cannons plus ammunition 300 miles over mountainous terrain from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. When asked to explain Knox's strategy several students described elements of the plan, but most couldn't demonstrate how it worked. Tony raised his hand. When I called on him he asked if he could draw a picture on the overhead. I handed him the marker and stepped out of the way. Tony explained how ropes attached to large trees had been used as pulleys to move the cannon up and down the mountain. "Coming down ... they put these tree trunks in front of the cannon. Sort

of like wedges. They kept it [the cannon] from going too fast." Tony had listened to other students read the chapter, processed the author's explanation, and accurately described the complicated procedure for his peers.

The cannon story was my "ah-ha" experience. Judith's description of Tony painted a picture of a non-reader and a non-writer. Yet what I had seen and heard suggested a wide range of literate ability. I had observed Tony's ability to retell a story sequentially, to understand and explain a process, and to use descriptive language. As I mentally juxtaposed Tony's identity as a non-reader and non-writer with the articulate young man I had seen in the classroom, the discrepancies puzzled me and raised questions I could not ignore. The cannon incident marked the beginning of my ongoing relationship with Tony.

This chapter constructs a profile (Taylor, 1990, 1993) of Tony as an able, literate learner. Beginning in December 1992 and continuing through December 1993, my interactions with Tony bridged his fourth and fifth grade years. Although Tony's in-class interactions and experiences were intricately related to his work with me, this chapter shares only observations and events documented as I worked with Tony outside of class on an individual basis. Most of the interactions described occurred during the spring or summer of 1993. The chapter, however, is not intended to provide a

chronological record of my work with Tony. I focus, instead, on Tony as a learner and the literate abilities he displayed as we worked together.

Using categories established by three studies (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) and expanded by Taylor (1993), I examine how Tony used reading and writing to construct autobiographical stories, to gain information to meet the practical and recreational needs of his everyday life, to reinforce social interactions, and to solve problems. Although such delineations greatly oversimplify the holistic, multilayered complexity of his literacy, they provide an organized way to talk about Tony's learning. I close the chapter with an explanation of my shift to an advocacy role (Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1990, 1991, 1993).

### **Tony: An Able, Literate Learner**

The contradictions and discrepancies between Judith's description of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer and the literate ability I had seen as he explained how the cannons were moved across the Berkshire Mountains puzzled me. As Judith and I sat in the teachers' lounge one day in late November 1992 eating lunch, I asked if I could work with Tony. "That would be great!" she responded. "He could use the individual attention."

We did not define specifically what I would do. I wanted to get to know Tony and provide opportunities for him to tell stories, ask questions, and feel good about sharing what he knew. Julie Tammivaara and Scott Enright (1986) describe the complexities and difficulties involved as adult ethnographers attempt to understand children's behavior in terms of the adult world. They state:

Ethnographers who insist on visiting and studying children from the rigid perspective of adulthood will in the end understand the reality of childhood no better than tourists who visit another land and do their best to bring "home" along with them. *Respect* for children and their own knowledge about themselves, as well as the same willingness to suspend (adult) judgment and perspective in talking with *children* as in talking with adults are key components of the successful ethnographer's interviews and participant observation. (p.218)

I did not want my time with Tony to be additional drilling on decontextualized skills. I wanted to observe and document examples of his literate abilities as they emerged from conversations and events he helped define.

After the 1992-1993 Christmas break my work with Tony settled into a comfortable pattern. I would let Judith know

when I planned to be at Thurber and ask what time it would be convenient for me to take Tony out of the classroom for about an hour. Taking Tony out of class minimized the disruption to Judith's class while providing the individual attention she believed he needed. I was uncomfortable with the skill-oriented activities and marginal participation that defined much of Tony's day in fourth grade. Taking him out of class, I hoped, would allow me to create a supportive environment in which he could define the agenda and feel successful. Such an environment, I was convinced, would provide a rich picture of his literate-learning (Taylor, 1993).

Though the specific time varied depending on everyone's schedule, Tony and I met for an hour at least once or twice a week during the second half of the 1992-93 school year. As we looked for a place to work, we would talk about what had happened since our last meeting. Sometimes we would slip into an empty classroom while the students were in art, music, or physical education. Other times we would end up in the teachers' workroom, sharing space with rolls of bulletin board paper and trying to talk over the monotonous drone of the duplicating machine. Often we would find the conference room at the back of the library empty. Though small, about 9'X 12', the conference room's high ceiling and large windows made the room seem less cramped. The



conference table and comfortable chairs provided a perfect place for us to build models, look at the newspaper or magazines, spread out photographs, or simply talk.

### Talking About Learning

As we walked from the classroom to find a spot to work, I would ask Tony what he had been doing or how things were going. I tried to keep my questions open-ended to let Tony set the agenda and then follow his lead. One of our conversations focused on learning: things he had learned by taking care of his newborn niece; how another niece learned to talk; and, the ways he thought people learn new things.

As Tony and I walked up the stairs to the library one afternoon in March 1993, he explained that he had been absent several days earlier in the week. "My friends missed me," he commented. "Yeah, they were asking about me. I have lots of friends," Tony added, "even the ones I don't remember from last year."

His comment puzzled me. "Really?" I asked. "Where were you in school last year?"

"I was here. But only for a little while. I had to move. Well, I wasn't really moving. I just had some things to sort out in Miami, with my older brother and his wife."

"Oh, so he and his family live in Miami."

"They used to, but they moved in with us."

"And he has two daughters?"

"Yeah, and one's a newborn." Tony's eyes brightened as he talked about his nieces. "You can do a lot of fun things with her," Tony explained. "You can lift her. You can feed her. I wasn't with them at the hospital because I didn't want to see that. When they came home with the baby she taught me how to change the diaper."

"Who taught you?"

"My sister-in-law. She taught me how to wrap her [the baby] because when they are small you have to wrap them in a certain way to keep them warm because at that age they are cold." Tony used his hands as well as words to describe the process of wrapping a baby, imitating the procedure his sister-in-law modeled.

"Was wrapping her easy?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's easy if you know how to do it."

"So having someone show you how to do something...."

"makes it easier," Tony added, finishing my thought.

"What else have you learned?" I inquired.

"I learned how to feed her - like to heat up the bottle. There's sort of powder food that you pour into water and it turns into milk. My mom taught me how to do that. If you give her over an ounce, like an ounce in a bottle, you have to burp her." Tony's eyes widened as he added expressively, "But that baby eats **so much!** The bottle

is about five ounces and she drinks it all without burping."

"Does she get a stomach ache then?" I asked.

Wrinkling his face and looking disgusted, Tony replied, "No, she pukes. Well, sometimes she'll burp. You have to put her over your shoulder and keep on hitting her back or sometimes you have to rub her back and then hit it."

"You've learned a lot."

"Still not enough," Tony commented.

Although I was interested in Tony's comments about learning to take care of the baby, I hesitated to push the subject too far. Our conversations, I learned over time, needed to meander. We would begin on one subject and dart to another with little closure. Allowing Tony to take the lead meant following his train of thought and making similar connections. Frequently I would be left in the dust, my mind racing to keep up or stretching to make the connections. Often we would return to the original topic, starting in the middle as if the digression had never occurred. As our conversation returned to his nieces, I asked what kinds of things he thought his other niece, a toddler, was learning.

"She doesn't know how to talk," Tony noted. "All she knows how to say is her mom's name and she says "Dad" and that's it."

"It takes a while to learn to talk though," I reminded

him. "How do you suppose kids learn to talk?"

"It takes a lot of practice," he added. "If they say one word they would have to keep on saying and saying it. Some people would have to help them sometimes with a word."

"Are there things you do to help her learn words?"

"Once in awhile I help her say "dad," or her dad's name, or my name. She hasn't learned my name or my youngest brother's."

"I'll bet she's proud of herself."

"We tell her she did a good job and she laughs. Sometimes she does funny things. She acts cute," Tony said grinning broadly as he described his niece's antics.

"That's neat. She's learning," I suggested.

"She learns something new every day."

"Do you think that's true of everybody, or just little kids?" I asked. "What kinds of things have you learned?"

"I learned a little reading and a little math. That's it."

"What about at home? Have you learned anything new at home."

"All I learned was to throw [out] the garbage and about babies."

The idea of learning came up several times in our conversation that day. Most often Tony focused on someone else's learning rather than his own. "There's this kid on

my bus," Tony commented. "He doesn't understand English. No, he understands a little."

"Does he speak Spanish?" I inquired.

"Yeah, he's learning how to read and stuff in English."

"How do you think you learn English when you've spoken Spanish your whole life," I asked.

"You got to help yourself," Tony suggested. "You've got to take time not to rush. Like if I were trying to teach him the word "book," I would spell it. Like write it on a piece of paper, and give it to him, and let him practice. I would help him practice right there and take it to his classroom too and practice on it."

Later in the same conversation Tony described helping a new girl in his class learn her spelling words. He explained, "Sometimes in school, in my classroom people have hard words like - if we have a spelling test and one of the spelling words was hard to say - I would help sometimes. We had this new girl and she was **behind** all the way. She had trouble spelling our spelling words. I just kept on saying the word until she got it right. Like she would have to keep on saying it right."

Tony's comments about learning suggested several things. In each case he described learning as occurring through interaction and with the support of other people (Moll, 1978; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989; Tharp &

Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978): his sister-in-law and mom taught him about the baby; he encouraged his niece; and, he helped other students. Tony was explicit about his learning at home: "I learned... how to change her diaper; ... how to wrap them in a certain way to keep them warm; ... how to feed her; ... how to burp her; ... [and] how to throw the garbage." Learning at school, like learning at home, required modeling and practice (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990), "I would ... give it to him and let him practice... [and] ... saying the word till she got it right." Tony saw himself in the role of teacher as well as the role of learner (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Tony talked easily about his learning at home and about how others learned in school. He was less clear or articulate about his own learning at school saying simply "I learned a little reading and a little math. That's it."

At home, Tony defined his engagement. If he were interested, he could pursue the learning. If not interested, he could walk away (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Learning at home built on Tony's questions and interests and incorporated authentic opportunities for practice (Heath, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In contrast, Tony had very little control over what was to be learned at school, how it would be learned or how success would be

assessed. Tony's success at home was not measured by the number of correct answers on a worksheet. Instead, there were authentic opportunities for self-assessment, revision, and re-doing.

### Tony's Stories

I wanted to support opportunities at school for Tony to pursue his interests, have authentic practice and assess his own progress. At a conference in February 1993, I told a colleague who had worked extensively with writers of all ages about Tony and asked if she had any ideas. "Why don't you let him make a book," she suggested. "It would give you a chance to talk about the way books are set up and let him write about things that are important to him. He could dictate or write himself - or even some of both." The book idea provided opportunities for Tony to use reading and writing to share several autobiographical stories.

"The Human Cannonball". As soon as I returned from the conference, I bought Tony a blank book and took it with me to Thurber. "I brought something for you today," I said as Tony and I cleared a space in the teachers' workroom to sit.

"Oh, yeah, what?"

"It's a book, but it's empty. I thought over the next few weeks, between now and the end of the year, this could be a place for you to dictate or write things you wanted to

share." I had also brought a copy of Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* so Tony would have a model to look at as he began his book.

Opening O'Dell's book and flipping through the first several pages, Tony said, "[There's] sort of like a nothing page and then a title."

"You're right. One thing you could do is leave those pages blank so you could think about what you want to name it [your book]. You may not want to think of a name today."

"I was thinking. I was thinking about something. I was thinking about *Tony's Dreams*."

"Ooo, that's a neat idea. You could put **anything** in a book like that couldn't you?"

We talked about the information on the title page of O'Dell's book and wrote the title *Tony's Dreams* across the middle of the page of the book. Tony identified himself as the author and illustrator and that information was added to the title page. Thurber was the name he wanted for a publishing company and 1993 would be the copyright date. He added both to the title page. Turning the page of O'Dell's book, I asked, "Do you know what this part of the book is? It's called the dedication."

"Oh, you're dedicating the book to somebody special. I'll dedicate it to my new niece. I'll just put: For my favorite niece and then put her name."



Tony did not hesitate when I asked what he would like to write about first. "I can write about when I was traveling [with the carnival], about people throwing themselves in cannonballs - human cannonballs," he said. The story of the human cannonball Tony dictated that day was the first of many stories recorded in *Tony's Dreams*.

#### The Human Cannonball

I traveled with the carnival when I was small. I felt scared when I saw people go in the cannon. I learned about a human cannonball.

If I were a human cannonball I would have to put my life in the hands of another person. A friend would have to load the cannon before any of the carnival starts. He would have to aim the cannon where I wanted to land. He would have to measure my weight and then add the weight of the suit. He would have to measure the pressure of the cannon and how far and how high I would go.

I'd have to wear a leathery suit. It is silver and very slippery. I wear a helmet that protects my eyes, my nose, my ears and my head. I would wear big boots that come up to my knees.

Tony added a drawing to the story about the human cannonball (See Figure 13). He labeled the cannon, hay bales, and

mattress without assistance. The lines leading out of the cannon represented the path of the human cannonball through the air. Between the lines Tony wrote the words "shout up" (shoot up) and drew an arrow to indicate the direction of the human cannonball's flight.

Tony and I talked about his narrative, the picture, and about the dangers of being a human cannonball. Questions reflecting my lack of familiarity with the topic and an interest in the mechanics of launching a human cannonball validated Tony's out-of-school experiences and encouraged him to provide a more detailed description (Cazden, 1988; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

"People use theirself for human cannonball... they put these kind of slippery suits on," he said. "And they put these bullets - I mean not bullets - They put the helmets on and slip in and fly. Somebody else aims it and fires."

"Are they kind of like wet suits?" I asked trying to compare the suits he described to something familiar.

"They're silverish leather suits."

"And they wear helmets. Kind of like the bicycle helmet?"

"Something different. They'll cover their ears, their whole, they'll go like up to here," Tony explained pointing to the middle of his cheekbone.

"Why do you suppose that's important?" I asked.

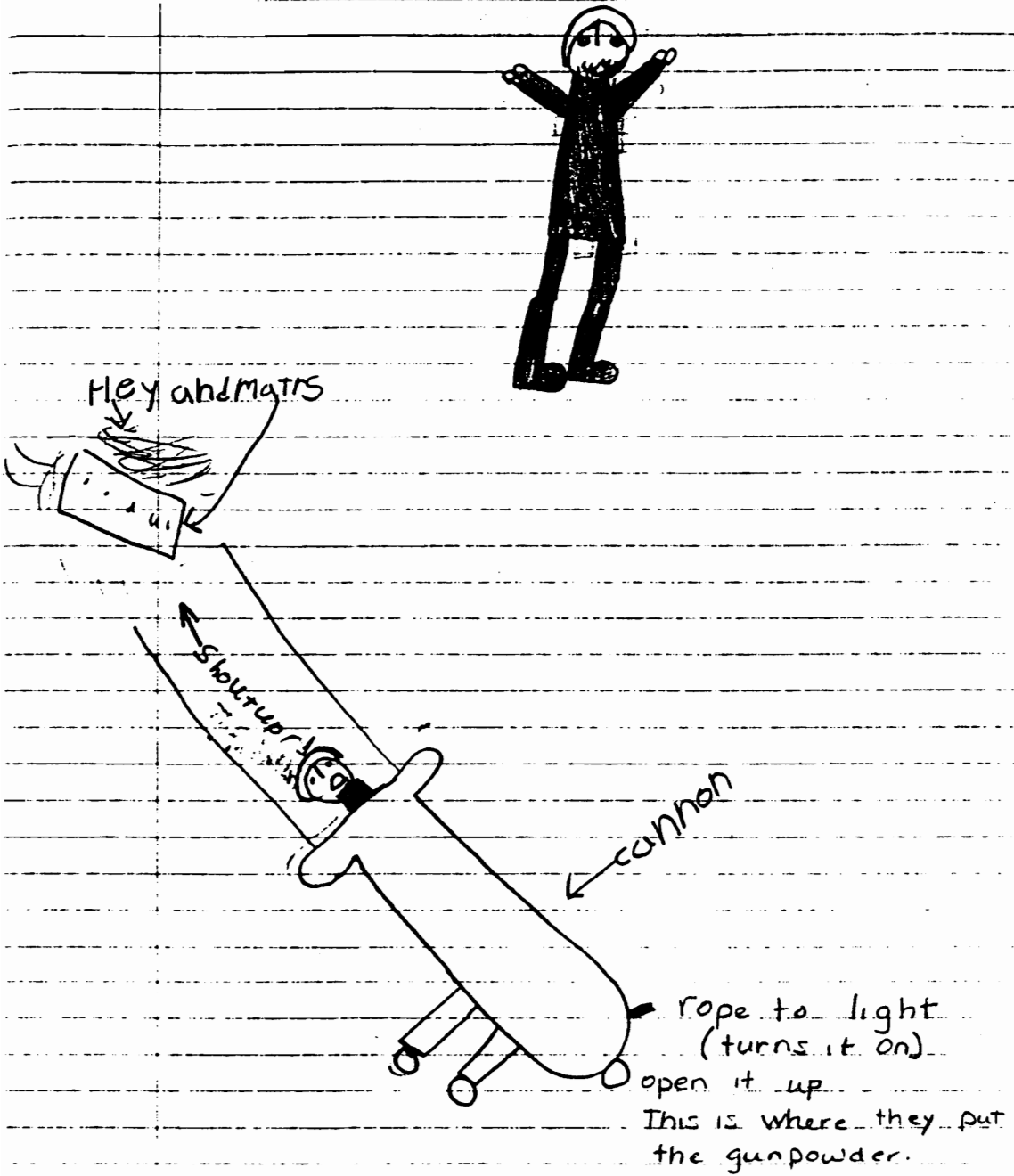


Figure 13.

Drawing to accompany the story about the human cannonball.

"[So] not to hit their eyes," Tony explained. "Or when they land not - Or like sometimes when you shoot it sparks'll come out or at least smoke. So it will be for either one."

As Tony talked and I recorded his thoughts in *Tony's Dreams*, I noticed how animated and articulate he became as he constructed a narrative based on his out-of-school experiences. He was the expert; I was the learner (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). As I learned about being a human cannonball, I also learned about Tony. I began to understand the uniqueness of his experiences with the carnival and the wealth of knowledge he brought to the learning environment (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

"They aim it somewhere so like when the other person comes out they're safe instead of landing in the crowd," Tony explained. "... they have to aim and measure where he's going to land at first. They put like a stack of hay or mattress or something there. I wouldn't do it because I was too young. They wouldn't let no kids do it. We just had it out in field or something."

"How do you suppose he felt when he was **inside** the cannon?" I wondered aloud.

"He would have felt scared sometimes. Sometimes he maybe would have measured the wrong way or he would miss. Two or three people got hurt like that."

"You'd sure have to trust the person who was doing the measuring wouldn't you?" I commented referring to the first line of Tony's story.

"You'd have to trust them a lot. You'd have to put your life in his hands." Tony explained. When I asked Tony to underline his favorite sentence in the narrative he didn't hesitate. He underlined: "If I were a human cannonball I would have to put my life in the hands of another person."

Tony and I returned to "The Human Cannonball" story several times during the spring and summer months. Each time he chose part of the story to read. Regardless what section of the story he chose to read, he included the sentence about putting his life in the hands of another person. He read confidently and fluently, with few, if any miscues. The story provided an opportunity for him to organize his thoughts and relate meaningful autobiographical experiences in his own words.

"My Day in the Hospital". Tony's ability to organize his thoughts and tell an engaging autobiographical story was also evident during a visit to the library one day just before school started in the fall of 1993. Tony was anxious to tell me about the family's trip to the hospital with his younger brother. I suggested he write about what happened.

He asked for a piece of paper, picked up a pen and went to work. While I looked at books, Tony wrote. Five minutes later he handed me the paper with one sentence written.

"What's this say?" he asked, a mischievous grin spreading across his face.

"Is this kind of a test," I asked, "to see if I can read your invented spelling?"

"Yeah," Tony said.

Spelling and handwriting had been emphasized in Tony's fourth grade class. As I worked with him both in and out of school, I encouraged him to not worry about letter formation and to use inventive spelling. I was more concerned with fluency than spelling as he began to write (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Graves, 1983; Routmann, 1991). He seemed to think if words were not spelled correctly others would not be able to read what he had written. Frequently I had to prove my ability to read what he had written. This represented just such an example.

"You're pretty tricky," I told him as I glanced at the story. " 'My day in the hospital' My brother was sick," I read.

"How'd you know that was hospital?" he asked.

"Because it's very close to the way hospital is really spelled," I explained. "You have all the sounds. You have h-o-s-p-t-l. You just left out a couple vowels. But you

did something very important. You put together letters that sounded like the word so that you could keep going with your story. I could figure it out because the spelling was so close."

"Sometimes when I don't really write things right it sounds like it," Tony said summarizing in a few words what I had used several sentences to explain.

"The important thing is getting your ideas down," I reminded him. "Later if you want to polish it you can work with someone to find the words that are misspelled and correct them. You have to trust yourself and believe that you are a good writer and reader."

Sitting down at the table, Tony picked up the pen and began writing the rest of his story. "I'm not going to use that word "throw up" on here," he commented. "I wonder how you can say it. If I can just remember that word. He..."

"Sometimes we say people vomit," I offered trying to figure out the word he might be searching for.

"No ... he (the doctor) said it in a different way that .... What does regurgitate...?" Tony said remembering the doctor's words. "Now that's one thing I don't know how to spell." With support and encouragement, however, Tony was able to approximate the spelling of the word regurgitate.

Pam: Think about it - re.  
Tony: r - e  
Pam: gur  
Tony: g - r  
Pam: gi  
Tony: j - a  
Pam: tate  
Tony: t - e - t Is that it?  
Pam: I could tell what you were saying.

"Will you read it to me?" I asked as he finished writing. With no hesitations or miscues (See Clay, 1985; Goodman, Y., Watson, & Burke, 1987; Johnston, 1992), Tony read the entire story. The topic had meaning for him and the content was written in his own words. He drew on the vocabulary he had heard the doctor and others use to make his narrative interesting and descriptive. The scaffolding I provided supported Tony as he constructed his own text rather than focusing on my goals and intentions (Searle, 1984). Tony's completed story engaged the reader and used many of the skills associated with literate behavior. It stated:

My day in the hosptl. My brother woz sick[.]  
We stood in the hospatl wth my brother. He wock  
up at 5:00 pm.



My brother ran to the bathroom[.] He  
regrgitet in the tolet and we ran to the hoptal[.]

Relating the events sequentially, Tony used acceptable sentence structure (i.e., subject, verb, prepositional phrase) and demonstrated an understanding of subject-verb agreement (i.e., we stood, he woke, we ran). His ability to use verb tense correctly was also evident (e.g., The event happened in the past and all of the verbs used were in the past tense). Tony appeared to grasp the relationship between letters and sounds (e.g., He used inventive spelling that closely approximated the standard spelling of the word and was consistent with the phonetic pronunciation of the word - hosptl for hospital, regrgotet for regurgitate). "My Trip to the Hospital," like "The Human Cannonball," demonstrated Tony's ability to use print to share personally meaningful stories about himself, his family, and his out-of-school experiences.

#### Using Print to Gain Information

As Tony and I worked together, I also recorded examples of how he used reading and writing to gain information to meet the practical and recreational needs of his day-to-day life. By reading Tony gathered information that he needed or wanted. For example, one afternoon just before the beginning of the 1992-93 school year, Tony and I visited the

public library near his house. We had not seen each other for a month because of vacations and I was anxious to hear all his news. The library allowed us to avoid the August heat and offered a quiet, comfortable place to work. The trip to the library provided Tony an opportunity to return some overdue books, replace his lost card, and check out some more books.

As we approached the front of the library I asked, "Can you tell me what it says on the door?" Tony easily read the word "library," hesitated and skipped the next word, and then continued to read, "Monday 10-9, Tuesday 10-6, Wednesday 10-9, Thursday 10-9, Friday closed, Saturday 10-6, Sunday 1-6." When he finished I waited, giving him time to figure out the second word. "Would it help if I told you the first letter, the h, is silent?" I asked.

His eyes brightened. "It's hours, isn't it?" Using the context and my phonetic clue Tony easily decoded the word.

During that same visit to the library, Tony filled out the form to replace his library card independently. Without hesitating he was able to read what the form required and provide the appropriate information. He knew and spelled correctly his name, address (including zip code), telephone number (including area code) and school. As he spelled the name of his street he read the letters aloud and then said

the word (i.e. S-t-a-f-o-r-d, Stamford). Pausing a moment he said, "No, that's not right. There's an m in there." Then he added the "m" he had left out of the word when spelling it the first time. It was exciting to see how comfortably he used print to meet the practical needs of his everyday life.

Gaining information about cars. Another way Tony used print was to learn more about one of his favorite topics of conversation - cars. Tony knew a great deal about cars and on several occasions used the classified ads in the newspaper to gather information about particular models he liked. After school one afternoon in early September 1993, he read me something he had written. "My favorite car is a Ford Mustang. When I turn 16 I will get a car. This is not an ordinary car. It's a Ford 5-0 Mustang, black with a gray interior. Without the 5-0 it will only go 85 I think," he explained. "With the 5-0 it will go 140."

"That's fast!"

"[Y]esterday in the newspaper that the teacher gave us I found one," Tony commented, "a convertible."

"How much was it?" I asked.

"\$11,993," Tony said opening the newspaper to the classified ads. "Here's a Mustang. It's made by Ford. Yesterday I found one like this," he explained and pointed

to a picture in the Magic Ford ad.

"How do you know if it's a 5-0?" I inquired.

"You call the dealer and they'll tell you. They're making a '94 Mustang, but it's going to look a lot different. The back is going to be more puffed out. It will have smoke pipes in the back. It will be a Mustang but they'll call it a Cobra." Our conversation continued for several minutes as Tony told me about new colors, antilock brakes, wide tires, and good transmissions. "Soon as I turn 13," he explained, "I'll only have three more years till I turn 16 and get my driver's license. I don't know if I'll pass the test. My dad got me that book that tells you how to drive from the motor vehicles."

Once again I was amazed, not just by what Tony knew, but by the ease with which he used print to find information he wanted to know. He easily spotted the ads for the cars he liked. He knew what all the abbreviations stood for and could explain why certain features made the cost of the car go up. He was interested in cars and demonstrated the ability to use print to gain information relevant to his day-to-day life.

Mastering Mortal Kombat. Tony also used print to gain information that enhanced his understanding and mastery of technologies. Frequently Tony and I would discuss video

games. As he shared his knowledge and expertise on Nintendo or Genesis II games, I admitted my ignorance and inadequate eye-hand coordination. He talked about mastering new games and comparing skill levels with friends. A conversation with Tony one afternoon after school reminded me of the complexity involved in mastering the video game world. As I gathered some of my things together, Tony sat across the table diligently copying from a wrinkled paper. "What's that?" I asked.

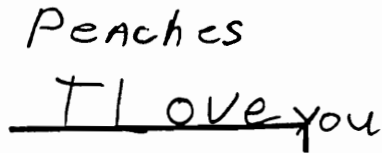
He handed me the paper filled with line after line of words and numbers. "I ordered this new video game, *Mortal Kombat*, from Radio Shack," he explained. "It came in over the weekend and I picked it up. Sam has the same game and he wrote down the commands you have to do to get it to do certain things, like make kills, and hits, and things like that."

"Is it like knowing all the secret ways to get to the princess in *Super Mario*?" I asked.

"Right," he answered, "except this is much harder!" Copying the commands Sam had written, Tony could go home and use them to conquer *Mortal Kombat*. He had, I concluded, used print to record the information that would help him master the technological challenges of the video game (Taylor, 1990, 1993).

## Reinforcing Social Interactions

Through reading and writing Tony also initiated and reinforced social relationships or interactions. During one of my first visits to Tony's fourth grade classroom, I observed as he passed a note to a friend. Though he used invented spelling, the note's message was clear: Can you play basketball with me on Saturday? Tony's notebooks and workbooks contained additional examples of his use of print to maintain social interactions. He often wrote the names of family members or his girlfriend (See Figure 14) and short messages in the margins.



Peaches  
I Love you

Figure 14. Written in margin of Tony's *Explode the Code*.

Besides notes to or about his girlfriend, Peaches, I collected many other examples of Tony's use of print to maintain social relations. Once after I had been out of town attending a conference I returned to find Tony had written me a note (Figure 15). The words were scrambled and my instructions from Tony were to see if I could figure out what it said.

I  
to  
work  
Mrs.  
from

✓ like  
✓ with  
✓ you  
SIMPSON

Figure 15. Scrambled note Tony wrote me.

Intrigued by the note and the decision-making and writing processes involved, I asked Tony to explain to me how he had written it.

"I mixed up the words ... just ... like in my *Explore the Code* book - like one here, one here, one in the middle and two down here. And you've got to put it together," he explained. "I knew how to spell them 'cause I copied them from the note you wrote me," he added. I had forgotten that I had written Tony a note several weeks earlier to let him know when I would be at Thurber the following week. Using my note as a resource and the scrambled word concept introduced in the *Explode the Code*, Tony used print to reinforce and maintain his relationship with me.

#### Using Print to Solve Problems

In addition to using reading and writing to share stories, gain information, and maintain social interactions, Tony used print to help him solve problems.

Alligators and crocodiles. One morning in late March 1992, as Tony and I walked through the library to the conference room, I stopped to pick up a copy of *Ranger Rick*. As we sat down at the table I handed the magazine to Tony. Inside the front cover was a picture of baby alligators born in an unlikely spot - a pond on a golf course. Tony was fascinated by the picture and explained that he knew a lot about alligators and crocodiles. "I know where there are books about alligators and crocodiles in the library," he said. Leaving the conference room he went directly to a section of bookshelves on the inside wall and pulled several books about alligators and crocodiles off the shelf.

We studied the pictures and I read portions of each of the books he thought would be interesting. "The longest crocodile ever captured was thirty feet long. The heaviest alligator ever captured weighed 500 pounds," I continued. Holding his finger to mark the end of the yardstick each time he measured, Tony determined just how long thirty feet was. A thirty foot alligator, he discovered, would be as long as the shortest bookcase in the library. "But how heavy is 500 pounds? Can you compare that to how much you weigh," I asked. He decided he could answer my question by using repeated addition (See Figure 16). Tony turned to a new page in *Tony's Dreams*, picked up his pencil, and began to work.



How many (Tony's) to make  
a 500 pound alligator?

$$\begin{array}{r}
 70 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 140 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 210 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 280 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 350 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 320 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 390 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 460
 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r}
 70 \\
 +420 \\
 \hline
 490 \\
 +70 \\
 \hline
 560 \\
 7
 \end{array}$$

Figure 16. Tony calculates how many of him it would take to equal the weight of a 500 pound alligator.

After he worked the addition problems, I asked him to explain what he had done. He talked me through the process: "Seventy plus seventy is one hundred forty, seventy more is two hundred and ten ...." He continued until he reached the problem  $350 + 70 = 320$ . "That's not right," he said

scribbling out his answer and reworking the problem. "Seven of me," he said once he finished, "would weigh *almost* as much, but 8 would weigh more."

Satisfied with his calculations, Tony wanted to add information about alligators and crocodiles to *Tony's Dreams*. Flipping through the reference books, he identified the information he wanted to include. He asked what particular words and sentences said, then put what he knew about alligators and crocodiles in his own words. He dictated:

I went to the library and I showed Mrs. Simpson a book about alligators and crocodiles. Alligators have a round nose. Crocodiles have a pointed nose. Crocodiles have teeth that go up outside his jaw. Alligators' teeth go in his mouth. They don't show when his mouth is closed.

Using the pictures and text in the books as references, Tony drew conclusions about the differences between alligators and crocodiles and summarized his learning. In this case, Tony had used print to gain and share information as well as to solve a problem.

Flags. Tony's use of print to solve problems was evident again one morning in April 1993, when he showed me

an encyclopedia he had purchased at the grocery. Flipping through the pages he explained that the grocery store had a different book each week and he was going to buy another one next week. Finding all our usual work spots occupied, we were heading down the stairs to the cafeteria when I asked if he had a favorite page. "Yeah," Tony said turning the pages until he found the section on flags. "I like this one best."

"This is really interesting. You know there are lots of flags in this building I can't identify. For instance, I don't know where that one came from," I commented pointing to a green, white and blue striped flag hanging in the cafeteria.

"Wait a minute," Tony said searching through the rows of flags to find one like the one I had pointed to. "Here it is. It's from... What's that say?"

"It says Sierra Leone. That's in Africa."

Using the encyclopedia, Tony identified all 23 of the flags hanging in the school. Starting with the flags in the main entrance hall, we talked about the order of the colors and the symbols or words that were on the flag. Tony ran his finger along each row of flags until he found one that matched. He tried to pronounce the country's name or asked "what's that say". Once he identified the country I copied the name into his journal (See Figure 17). Then we moved on

to the next flag.

Moving from the entrance hall to the stairwells we strained to pick up details in the flags above our heads. We sat on the stairs and searched through each page of flags. We were both learning. At one point I said, "wait a minute," then ran upstairs to get a globe so we could find a particular country. Later, as we looked at the red flag bearing a hammer and sickle, Tony reminded me, "You know there is no such thing as the Soviet Union - only Russia."

After we had worked for about fifteen minutes, two of my undergraduate students arrived to tour the building. I left Tony sitting on the steps, his journal balanced on his knees as he searched through the reference book to identify the remaining flags. Tony continued to record the names of the countries on his own during my twenty minute absence. His interest in this activity persisted until he had identified all of the flags and recorded the names of the countries in his journal (See Figure 17). In the process of identifying the flags Tony discovered two that were upside-down. Without hesitating he walked to the office and told the secretary about the error so the school's maintenance person could take the flags down and rehang them correctly.

Constructing a poster. Tony's use of print to solve problems was also obvious as he prepared a poster to share

Front Door - Senegal ✓  
Soviet Union ✓

Cafeteria - Costa Rica ✓  
Sierra Leone ✓

Side Entrance - South Korea ✓  
Vietnam ✓  
India ✓

Saudia Arabia ✓  
Israel  
Mexico

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Stairway: United Nations  
Taiwan  
France  
Cacana

Peru?

Venezuela

Korea North

Zaire

Costra

Germany

Belgium

Italy  
Panama  
Egypt

Figure 17. List of the flags in the hallways, stairwells and cafeteria at Thurber.

with his class and visitors to the school. He used previously written texts and other print in his environment to support his writing efforts.

One afternoon in October 1993, I handed Tony a stack of photographs I had recently had developed. "I had two copies made of each picture so you may have some if you'd like."

"Great, how many can I have?"

"You pick out six or so," I said, "and I'll give the rest to Ms. McMann [fifth grade teacher]. You know it would be neat if you could figure out some way to share them with the whole class."

"I could put them on a piece of paper or something."

"Sure," I answered. "In fact you could put them on a poster and write a sentence or two to explain what was happening so visitors would be able to see what your class does."

"Okay."

Securing a piece of poster board, Tony and I found a place where he could use the computer and spread the pictures out on a table. Thumbing through the stack of pictures again, Tony decided to focus on the shadow activity students had worked on in groups and the convocation program the class prepared for the entire school (See Figures 18 and 19). While writing a caption for the picture display, Tony moved back and forth within his text and between his text

and the environment to check his spelling and find the words he wanted to use. He tested his ideas, asking "How does this sound?" or "Do you think that's important?" Usually I responded by suggesting he write down as many ideas as he could think of and then go back to pick those that seemed most important.

He wrote, read what he had written, and then deleted words or phrases until he was left with texts that satisfied him (See Figures 18 and 19). Tony laid the texts and photographs of the two events (convocation and measuring shadows) out on the sheet of posterboard. When the arrangement pleased him, he turned each photograph and text over and numbered it on the back. Matching each number to its designated position on the posterboard, Tony glued the photographs and texts in place.

"How did you decide what to put where?" I inquired. His decisions were made, he said, based on helping other people understand what happened first, second, and third. In creating the poster display, Tony's organizational scheme was simple and straightforward. He used reading and writing to communicate sequentially occurring events through texts and pictures. He made choices about content and the format of his presentation. Keeping a vision of his audience in mind, he produced a clear and concise message.



## The Convocation

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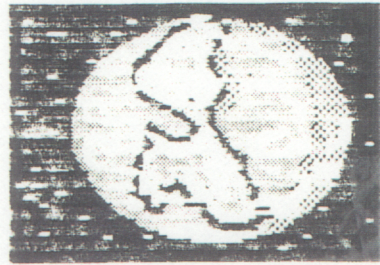
Our teacher taught us a school  
cheer. We taught 3rd and 4th  
graders a school cheer .

Figure 18. Photograph and description of Tony's fifth grade class presenting convocation program.





## Our Shadows



---

First we measured our height . Then we went outside and measured our shadows. We learned that our shadows move in a different direction because the Earth rotates around the sun.

Figure 19.

Photograph of Tony's class during shadow activity. Description written by Tony.

## Running Records

Tony's use of reading and writing to share stories, gain information, reinforce social interactions, and solve problems occurred naturally as he interacted with me. As the year progressed, I believed it was important also to systematically document Tony's reading ability in other ways. On two occasions during the year when we worked together, I asked Tony to select a book to read so I could complete a running record. Procedures for recording and analyzing Tony's oral reading were based on ideas presented in Marie Clay's (1985) *Early Detection of Reading Difficulties* (3rd ed) and Peter Johnston's (1992) *Constructive Evaluation of Literacy*. In early June 1993, I did a running record to document Tony's reading at the end of fourth grade. The second running record was completed in early October 1993. Both times Tony selected the book he wanted to read. The two running records represented important confirmation of his reading ability.

On the first occasion Tony chose one of his favorite stories, *The Seven Chinese Brothers*, and asked if we could take turns reading. I had read the book to him two or three times during the months we had worked together and we had taken turns, or partner-read, the book several times. During the 220 words of text read, Tony had 37 miscues for an accuracy rate of 84% and 14 self-corrections, for a self-

correction ratio of 14:51. For the second running record Tony selected part of the story "Cookies" from one of Arnold Lobel's frog and toad books. The text had 137 words. Tony had 10 miscues, for an accuracy rate of 92%, and 9 self-corrections, for a self-correction ratio of 9:19.

In both cases Tony was able to self-correct many of his miscues, a strategy that necessitates "comparing different sources of information, finding them discrepant, and doing something about correcting the discrepancy" (Johnston, 1992, p. 86). Focusing on the meaning of the text, Tony occasionally did not read the word correctly but his substitutions did not disrupt the meaning of the sentence. He read "home" instead of "house" in the sentence "Toad ran to Frog's house" and "tasted" rather than "eaten" in "These are the best cookies I have ever eaten." His substitutions made good sense, suggesting that he made predictions based on the extension of patterns into the future (Johnston, 1992).

Adapting a strategy from Marie Clay's (Clay & Cazden, 1990) Reading Recovery Program, I asked Tony to select a sentence he found interesting or he especially liked from the text of "The Cookies." He chose the sentence: "And they taste even better," he said. I wrote each word on an index card, mixed up the cards, and asked him to put the words together so they made sense. The first time he arranged

them in the following order: "And they even taste better," he said.

"Would you read that for me?" I asked.

"`And they even taste better,' he said."

"Do you think that makes sense in the story?"

Tony whispered the words to himself as he reread the sentence before answering. "Yeah it does."

"Good for you," I commented. "Now, can you arrange the words a different way and still have them make sense?" Tony moved the words around several time before deciding on another arrangement.

"What does it say?" I asked.

"`And taste even they better,' he said. That don't make sense," Tony said looking first at the words, then at me, and then back to the words.

"You're right it doesn't. Can you change the words around so it does make sense?" Tony moved the cards once again. This time he came up with: "And he said they taste even better," which he decided also made sense in the context of the story. In the context of his emerging literacy, watching Tony rearrange the words to make sentences provided important insights. As he became more fluent and comfortable with print, Tony was able to use problem solving strategies to manipulate words and construct contextually appropriate sentences.

### Assuming the Role of Advocate

Initially my work with Tony was intended to support his learning and provide an opportunity for him to read, write, and talk. Convinced descriptions of Tony as non-reader and non-writer with borderline ability were incomplete and inaccurate, I made observational notes and documented his learning and literate abilities (cf. Taylor 1990, 1993).

In working with Tony I followed his interests and questions and encouraged connections between his in-school experiences and his out-of-school world (Moll & Greenberg, 1991). As he wrote I emphasized fluency first and mechanics only to provide clarity (Graves, 1983; Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Having him write often and for a variety of reasons was more important than having everything spelled or punctuated correctly. When he dictated, I recorded his exact words and attempted to extend his thinking by asking questions. My questions were intended to clarify my understanding and stimulate his thought. As Eleanor Duckworth (quoted in Cazden, 1988) suggests:

To the extent that one carries on a conversation with a child as a way of trying to understand the child's understanding, ... obliges the child to think a little further also.... What do you mean? How did you do that? Could you give me an example? How did you

figure that? In every case, those questions are primarily a way for the interlocutor to try to understand what the other is understanding. Yet in every case, also they engage the other's thoughts and take them a step further. (p. 100)

When we met Tony decided what he wanted to read and how the reading would be structured. Reading was not limited to workbooks or textbook, but included trade books, magazines, newspapers, comic books, menus, instructions. and signs. Sometimes we took turns, alternating paragraphs or pages. Other times he had ask me to read or he chose to read an entire selection on his own. I established the broad parameters (that we spent time whenever we met reading) and he defined the rest. In our interactions I focused on what Tony could do both independently and with my support (Newman, Griffin, Cole, 1989; Vygotsky, 1997).

### Advocacy

When Judith referred Tony for special education evaluation my role began to change. Following Tony's referral in March 1993, I began to see myself as an advocate rather than simply an outside resource person interested in supporting Tony's learning. Special education evaluation and possible placement, I believed, could inaccurately label Tony and limit his educational opportunities. Advocating

for Tony did not change the way I worked with him, but redefined the care with which I documented our interactions. The need to systematically observe and record (Taylor, 1990, 1993) Tony's literate abilities became more pressing. I contacted Mrs. Mitchell in early April 1993, explained my interest in Tony and asked permission to tape my conversations with him, copy his work, look at his permanent records, and have access to the results of any testing done as part of the psychological evaluation.

Testing procedures and completion of the psychologist's confidential evaluation of Tony shifted my position further towards an advocacy role and precipitated several actions on my part. I prepared a document based on my work with Tony to counter Judith's description of him and the psychologist's report. The document identified the inadequacies of procedures used to test Tony, recorded his literate abilities, and made instructional and curricular recommendations (See Appendix D).

Since I believed continuing to define Tony's instructional and curricular program in terms of decontextualized drills on skills limited his opportunities to read and write (Edelsky, 1991, 1992; Goodman & Goodman, 1990), I approached principal Aaron Jones to request that Tony be placed in Ann McMann's fifth grade class for the 1993-94 school year. Reading and writing opportunities were

what, I believed, Tony needed. Ann McMann provided opportunities for her students to read widely, become fluent writers, assess their own progress, and exercise some control over their own learning. Such an environment would strengthen literate abilities hidden by narrowly defined programs emphasizing repetition and the mastery of skills (Edelsky, 1991, 1992).

Lastly, in early August 1993, I talked with Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell about Tony's placement for the 1993-94 school year. Conversations I had with Mrs. Mitchell at the end of the 1992-93 school year suggested she believed Tony needed to work harder. She proposed that he repeat fourth grade so he could "learn more." Sitting at their kitchen table in early August 1993, the Mitchells and I discussed retention. "If Tony remains in fourth grade he will be almost three years older than many of the students," I commented. "That's a significant difference, particularly as Tony enters pre-adolescence. He'll be socially, physically, and emotionally more mature than his classmates." Mr. Mitchell believed Tony's age was an important consideration. "It wouldn't be good for him to be in a class where some [of the other students] are three years younger than him," he commented. "That's too much difference."

Acknowledging their concerns about Tony learning to read and write, I described Ann McMann's fifth grade class



and the difference I believed it would make in Tony's literacy-learning. "Ann McMann creates an environment where students are given the time, space and encouragement necessary to become active readers and writers (Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1992; Short & Burke, 1991)," I explained. "Students work together and support each others learning. Those are the kinds of interactions and experiences Tony needs" (Rosenblatt, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

#### A Window on Tony's Literacy, But Not Enough

Although my work documented literate abilities obscured by the structure of Judith's classroom and standardized testing, it had shortcomings. It was an assessment produced in a particular context and a result of unique interactions. Taking Tony out of the classroom and working with him on an individual basis limited what I could see. Interacting with me in an artificial setting did not reveal what Tony could do in a supportive classroom environment, with the guidance of the teacher or in collaboration with his peers.

My work provided a window into Tony's literacy-learning but not the depth or breadth of the entire picture. To fully understand assessments of Tony's literate ability and learning I had to examine them in the context of Tony's classroom experiences and interactions and his perceptions

of them (Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1993). I had to observe and document Tony's literate learning in the context in which it was embedded and assessed, in the context of Ann McMann's fifth grade class.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ASSESSMENT IN THE FIFTH GRADE: TONY AS A READER AND WRITER

If we give the learner the role of failure, he will fill that role for us. In contrast if we give him the role of successful learner and a literate individual, then that is how he will generally respond to us.

Peter Johnston, *Constructive Evaluation of Literate Activity*

Immaculate in his tee-shirt, black jeans, and sneakers, Tony Mitchell walked across the hall and sat down on the stairs near the main entrance of Thurber Intermediate School. Though it was the first day of the 1993-94 school year, there were only a handful of people milling around in the corridor. It was early, twenty minutes before the first buses were scheduled to arrive and a half an hour before classes would begin. As he leaned forward and rested his chin on his hand, Tony's brown hair framed his face and brushed the collar of his shirt. His eyes widened as he surveyed the scene, the images of teachers, parents and students merging with the cacophony of sounds filling the hallway. Within two or three minutes he began talking with Sam, one of the students from his fourth grade class.

Over the next fifteen minutes more students joined Sam and Tony on the stairs and teachers gathered in and around the office. At 8:50 principal Aaron Jones asked teachers to proceed to the parking lot and hold up the sign bearing

their name. Sam, Tony, and several other students followed the teachers to the parking lot where buses were unloading. For the next ten minutes the parking lot buzzed with activity as students and teachers confirmed class assignments. At 9:00, fifth grade teacher Ann McMann looked first at Aaron and asked "May we leave?" and then to her class, "Are we ready?" Receiving affirmative answers to both questions, she led Tony and twenty-four other students up the two flights of stairs to her third floor room.

As I watched the students enter the building I recalled a conversation Tony and I had the week before. "You talked to my mom and dad about letting me go to fifth grade didn't you?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, wondering if they had discussed the idea of retention with him. "How do you feel about that?" I inquired.

"I'm glad," he replied. "I'll get to be with my friends, but I'll have to work really hard. If the teacher makes me work hard then I'll learn to read and all that." Following the students up the stairs I wondered if the instructional environment in Ann's classroom would support Tony's literate-learning and allow him to be assessed as a reader and writer.

This chapter examines how the assessment of Tony as a capable reader and writer was produced in the context of

Ann's fifth grade class. I explore Tony's inclusion in the classroom community of readers and writers and his purposeful use of linguistic resources as tools for thinking, cooperation, and communication. I describe Tony's interactions and experiences in an instructional environment that encouraged him to build connections, make choices about his own learning, draw on personally experiences, and self-assess his own learning. I analyze the instructional, curricular and assessment practices that defined Tony as a capable reader and writer in Ann McMann's fifth grade class.

#### **Structure of Ann's Fifth Grade Class**

Beginning the first day of school and continuing until Christmas vacation I spent four days a week in Ann's classroom. Ann explained my presence to the class by saying I was another teacher who would be in the room several days a week. Believing "Tony should be part of the class and to do what the rest of the class was doing," Ann put the *Explode the Code* and math workbooks sent from fourth grade in the closet. "We'll work on his skills in the context of whatever the class is doing," she explained at lunch during the first week of school. Ann believed that Tony's literacy-learning could be supported most effectively in the context of classroom activities rather than through individualized skill-oriented instruction.

Tony's inclusion in all aspects of classroom life expanded my field of vision. I watched as Tony worked individually, with partners, in small groups, or as part of the whole class. At times I sat in a corner of the room taking fieldnotes. Other times I was actively involved in class activities. Sometimes Ann would ask me to meet with Tony and several other students as they conducted a literature circle or performed an experiment. At other times Tony headed for the library to do research with a group of friends, while I helped other students edit their stories or video tape a news report they had written. Beginning the first day of the 1993-94 school year, Tony's experiences were part of the seamless fluidity of classroom life.

#### Part of a Community of Readers and Writers

Talking about summer vacations, the latest video games, or movies they had seen, students entered Ann's room on the first day of school and found places to sit. Desks were arranged in a large U shape, six along the outside, or window wall, four across the back and five more on the inside wall. Ten more desks faced each other in two rows of five in the center of the U. The arrangement of the twenty-five desks in Ann's room changed frequently, I learned, a physical reminder that groups within the class were flexible

and fluid. Ann's classroom contained the conventional trappings associated with school: TV and VCR on a rolling cart, tape recorder, maps, computers and a printer, chalkboard, and books. With the exception of four poems Ann had copied on large pieces of bulletin board paper there were few decorations in the room. This situation would change drastically over the coming weeks as students' poems, projects, displays, stories, and vocabulary words filled every available space on walls, windows, doors, and the ceiling.

As Tony and five other boys settled into the desks on the arm of the U nearest the window, Ann began their first day. "I'm Ms. McMann. What I always want to do on the first day is get to know everyone. I'm going to give each of you a card," Ann explained as she passed 3x5 ruled index cards to all of the students. "How many of you do not know all of the people in this room?" she asked. A few hands went up as the students looked around the room and matched names with faces. "Most of you know each other. What we're going to do is have a little mixer. Is there anything people in here don't know about you? For example, maybe you won the lottery, you took a family trip, or you have a new pet. Take the card and write a sentence that tells us something we don't know about you."

Looking at the card, Tony picked up his pencil and

touched the eraser to his cheek. He glanced at what Steve, to his right, and Serge, to his left, were writing. Scooting back in his seat and leaning forward on the desk, Tony began to write. While filling out the card Tony followed a pattern I had seen repeatedly as I worked with him the previous school year and during the summer. He would write, then erase, write a bit more, and then erase again. On the card he wrote the word krt (cart) and then erased it. He erased words he was not certain he could spell correctly. After an attempt, he would erase the word and either use a different word or leave it out altogether. Tony's completed card read:

9/7

I rod in my go krt

When everyone had finished writing Ann walked around the room and collected the cards. Reversing her direction, she shuffled the cards and gave them out again, making sure no one had their own. "If you have your own card," she remarked, "please let me know and I'll give you another one. I'd like for you to quietly get up out of your chair. I want you to move around the room interviewing people saying, 'Are you the one who...?'" When you find the person who wrote the card you have to remember their name so you



can tell us." For several minutes everyone, including Ann, walked around the room. A low hum filled the room as students read their card and asked: "Are you the one who went to Disney World?" "Are you the one whose cat has one blue eye and one green eye?" "Are you the one who collects baseball cards?" or dozens of other questions.

Tony moved around the room and talked quietly to classmates. When he reached the corner of the room where I was standing he showed me the card and remarked, "This doesn't make any sense." I looked at the card and read: "I will go to Lach Haven." Puzzled, I admitted to Tony I was not sure what it meant either.

"You might show the card to other students to see if anyone recognizes it," I suggested. "Or you could ask Ms. McMann if she knows who wrote it." Tony did both. Though he showed the card to several of his classmates and to Ms. McMann, he had not determined who wrote it by the time Ann asked students to return to their seats.

"If you discovered the name of the other person," Ann continued, "I'd like you to introduce them to the class. First though, there's one card we're having trouble identifying." She read aloud the card Tony had, but no one claimed it. Someone suggested it might belong to Jerry, the special education student mainstreamed into Ann's class only during the first few minutes of the day, at lunch and during

special classes such as art, music and PE. Once the mystery was solved the introductions began: Tammy has a black and white cat; Angela has a hermit crab; Nancy has an imagination; Sam has a kitten named Clovis; Brian likes to play hockey; Steve went to a Buccaneer game; Ms. McMann has a twin sister, and so on until everyone had a turn.

The mixer complete, Ann asked students to write in their journals. "I'd like you," she explained, "to reflect on today. Write your feelings as you started the day." Tony hesitated and looked at what his neighbors were writing. He wrote several words and then looked back over what he had written, mouthing each word as he read. He closed his journal, put his pencil down, and looked around the room. Most everyone was still writing. Opening his journal Tony reread what he had written, erased, wrote a word or two, and then closed his journal again.

While students wrote in their journals, I walked around the room reading over their shoulders, inquiring about their summer, and commenting on the information they had shared on the card. I stopped briefly beside Tony's desk. "Would you like to share what you wrote?" I asked. Tony opened his journal and read. "I was nervous coming back to school. I couldn't sleep last night."

"You did a great job getting your feelings down on paper," I commented. "Were there places you stopped to take

a breath?" I asked trying to push his learning further and assess what he remembered from previous conversations about using punctuation to clarify meaning. Tony nodded. "That's where you'll need some sort of punctuation," I added, "so the reader will know to pause or stop." Tony read the entry to himself and put a period in one spot. Then rereading the entry he decided to move the period to a different place. Within two or three minutes he had added a period to the end of each sentence. My questions and comments, I hoped, encouraged Tony to connect what he had written to previous learning and to clarify the meaning of his entry by adding appropriate punctuation (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

"As you finish your entry," Ann told the class, "I'd like you to share what you wrote with someone else." Tony and Steve read their entries to each other. Once they had finished, Tony picked up his pencil and added another sentence to his journal entry. Though not exactly like one of Steve's sentences, Tony's sentence expressed a similar thought: he was glad to see his friends. After talking with Steve, Tony crossed out the word "wuz" in two of his sentences and replaced it with w-a-s. Reading his journal entry to Steve, prompted Tony to add more information to his entry and correct the spelling of a word. Steve provided Tony with a real audience and a meaningful reason for

reading and writing (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Tony's completed entry read:

was  
I ~~wuz~~ nrvs kumig back to school.  
I coont slep lat not.  
I ~~wuz~~ glat to se my frers.  
was

As I moved away from the boys and towards Angela's desk I overheard Steve, who had been in Judith's class, asking Tony about math. "Are you going to be in the second grade math book again this year? Or are you going to be in the fifth grade book?" he asked. "My little brother was in the same book you were in last year," he added before Tony had a chance to answer. Tony mumbled that he did not know and went on writing in his journal. Ann had put a fifth grade math book on everyone's desk and thus far there had been no indication Tony would be treated any differently than the rest of the class.

Several times in the first two months of the 1993-94 school year comments similar to Steve's served as a vivid reminder of the descriptions of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer and of his separation from his peers. In late September I sat with Tony and a group of students as they completed an experiment and talked about reflection and refraction. As they read sections in the encyclopedia and

other resources, they searched for information that would help them explain why the pencil appeared to bend when they placed it in a glass of water. Taking turns reading, students passed the book around the small circle where they sat on the floor in one corner of Ann's classroom. "Do you want to read?" Serge asked Tony when everyone else had a turn. Tony shook his head and said, "No, you do it." As Serge handed the book to one of the girls in the group he looked at me and explained, "He [Tony] can't read."

The perception of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer produced in his fourth grade class was part of his identity as he began fifth grade. Unable to read or write described one of the ways Tony's peers saw him and one of the ways Tony saw himself. Comments Tony made repeatedly during the nine months I worked with him prior to the beginning of the 1993-94 school year suggested that he saw himself as "not able to read so good." Questions and comments from his peers reflected the assessment of Tony as "unable to read or write." Gradually the stigma of being a non-reader and non-writer was undercut as Ann provided opportunities for Tony to read and write in collaboration with his peers.

#### Collaboration and Cooperation

Ann continued to include Tony in every aspect of classroom activity and construct opportunities for him to

work collaboratively and cooperatively with his peers. An hour into the second day of school Ann stood at the front of the room and introduced an activity based on a poem by Judith Voirst. "Yesterday," she said, "we read 'The Homework Machine.' This morning you are going to design your own homework machine. After you design your machine you may draw it out on large paper. I'd like for you to design the perfect machine to work for you." As she talked, Ann moved easily between desks. "There are some things you will want to think about," she continued. "If I put assignments in, where are they going to come out? What is the machine going to look like? How will it work? Think before you do anything," she cautioned. "In this class we never have a finished product the first time. Put your ideas on paper, or doodle, first."

"Can we work with someone?" asked Jenny.

"Certainly," Ann answered. "If you choose to work with someone else, however, you must pick someone you work well with and who will help you produce a product. Choose a person not only who you like but who will help you produce the machine you want to produce." Students began talking with each other and breaking off into groups to formulate ideas. While some students went into the hall or to the steps near the library and others occupied tables or corners of the classroom, Steve and Tony worked at their desks.

Pulling out a piece of notebook paper, Steve sketched three rectangles. The largest rectangle, drawn in the middle of the page, became the body of the homework machine and a smaller rectangle placed directly on top of the larger became the head. Steve put a third rectangle lengthwise inside the largest rectangle. "Put the handle right here," he said, drawing a thick u-shape in the middle of the third rectangle and adding several more small squares and rectangles inside the largest rectangle.

"Yeah, and the assignments can slip right through here," Tony suggested, pointing to the one of the smaller rectangles.

"It has to have a time here, how long?"

"Five minutes?" Tony suggested questioningly. Steve wrote 5:00 inside one of the small rectangles. "This should be where you slip work through ... and it comes out here," Tony continued as he pointed to several of the smaller rectangles inside the largest rectangle.

Building on Tony's suggestion Steve added the words math, English, and science to the machine explaining, "You push in what you want." Moving the paper towards Tony, Steve asked, "What do you want to draw?"

"That's pretty good," Tony said without offering to add anything to the picture Steve had drawn.

"Just do something" Steve insisted. "I want you to do

something. Put some arms on it."

Moving the sheet of notebook paper to his desk, Tony added arm-like projections to each side of the largest rectangle. "I don't know if I did this right. We'll put legs for wheels."

"Let's put different kinds of wheels," suggested Steve moving the drawing once again to his desk. "You'll like this one," he added drawing legs that looked like they would expand and contract.

As Steve and Tony talked about the wheels, Ann stood in front of their desks. She watched and listened as the boys negotiated details of their homework machine. They decided the machine should have a spike haircut and the hair should add color to the machine. "This thing gots to have eyes," Tony commented as he added eyes and a mouth to one of the rectangles. At Tony's suggestion the boys settled on "Zach" as a name for the machine.

"Don't forget," Ann reminded the boys as she began to move away, "you have to put directions on your machine so other people will know how it works."

"I've got an idea." Tony said. "Anybody can just crank it for as long as you want it. Like...."

"Crank time."

"No, set time."

"To set time - crank. That's it." Thinking out loud as



he wrote the directions, Steve said, "Set? s-a-t"

"That says sat," Tony commented looking at what Steve had written. "I think it's an e or an i."

"You're right. It's an e," Steve corrected s-a-t to s-e-t and wrote:

#1 - Set the time and crank.

#2 - When time is up open...

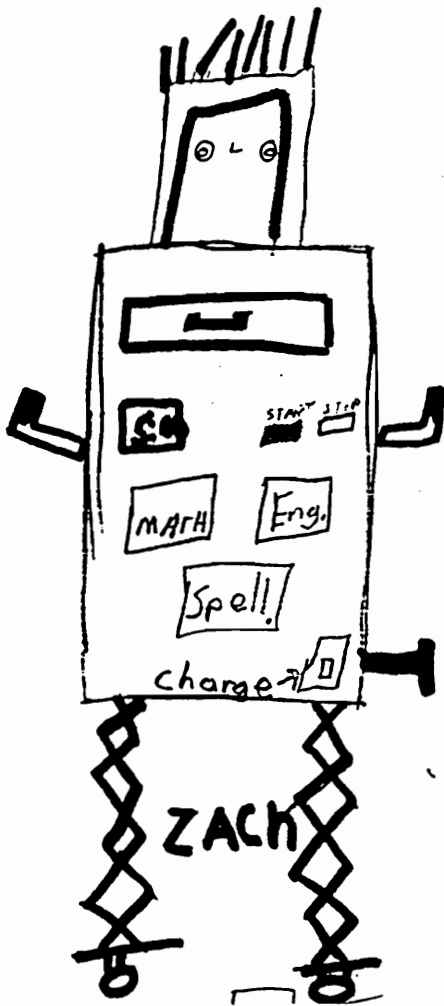
"... drawer, " said Tony, finishing Steve's thought.

"When time up open drawer," Steve repeated.

"When time is up open drawer," Tony continued, filling in the word Steve omitted. "I think... it should have a little bell that goes off when time is up. You know like the microwave. [Put] when you have carefully read the instructions you may begin" (See Figures 20 and 21).

Writing, drawing, and reading Steve and Tony defined specific details of the homework machine, expanded on each other's ideas, and negotiated responsibilities for the assignment. Both assumed responsibility for generating ideas, incorporating the criteria Ann established into the design of the machine, and clearly communicating the machine's operating instructions. In this setting Tony and Steve were allowed and encouraged to be partners. The role of leader or expert shifted easily back and forth between the two depending on the immediate circumstances.

9/8/93 10:47

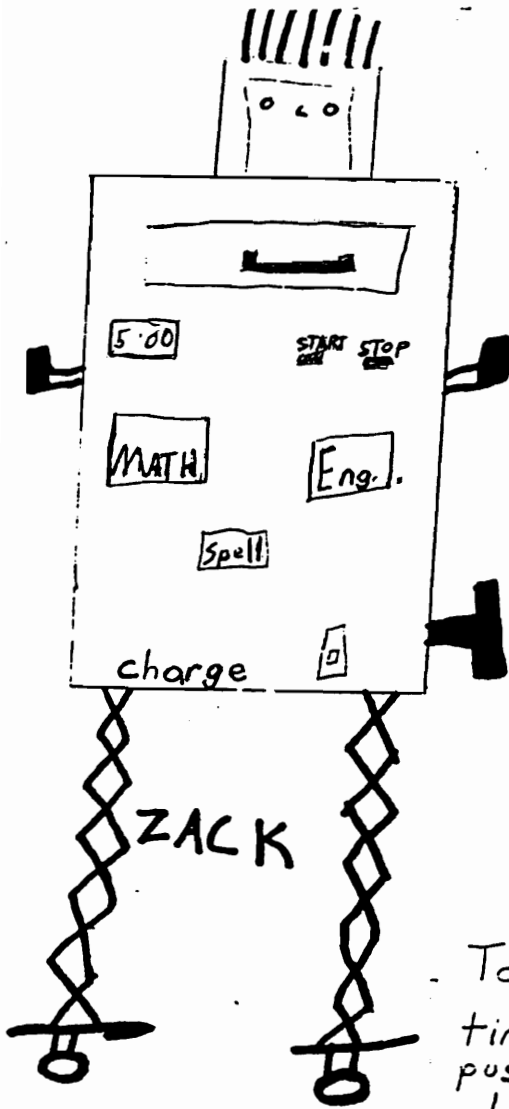


To set time  
crank  
time up open door  
push start to begin  
when ready push  
subject  
to charge flip  
switch

when you have read  
the intrions carefully  
you may start

Figure 20. Rough draft of the homework machine.

9/8/93



To set time crank  
time is up open door  
push START to begin  
when ready push subject  
to charge flip switch.  
When you have read the  
intructions carefully. You may start.

Figure 21. Completed homework machine.

Although Ann initiated the assignment, Steve and Tony were able to jointly interpret the task and determine the focus to meet their goals. Each expressed his thoughts without reformulating or suppressing the ideas of the other. The contributions each of the boys made were significant and integral parts of the process and product (Cazden, 1988; Gallimore & Tharp, 1989; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

Ann recognized the central role of language as a medium through which literacy learning could occur. She encouraged the purposeful use of linguistic resources, both spoken and written, as tools for thinking, cooperating and communicating in relation to the task (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Taylor, 1990, 1993). Recognizing the social nature of learning, Ann provided time and space for Steve and Tony to collaboratively plan and carry out their project (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1988; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991). She shared her thoughts with me in a follow-up interview in March 1994. She stated:

What I want to do is to have the child steeped in opportunities to develop literacy. I don't mind the noise because I know that's the social development and they are learning from one another. I expose them to so many different types of things to broaden and

stretch them.... I want them to be able to function anywhere. I provide a lot of print for my kids. I ask them to do a lot of impromptu writing. Reading aloud is not my first priority.

As she moved around the room, Ann assessed how well the product met the established criteria and how effectively students were interacting. Her interruptions were minimal and designed to either remind students of specific requirements or encourage cooperation.

Ann extended students' learning further by asking them to explain in written text why they had designed their homework machine the way they did. Steve and Tony wrote:

We desiged are machine so we would not have to do homework. We also put a charge on it so, while we are at school it would be charging. We put wheels on it so it could be are playmate.

His hair can prevent colors on yor paper

Ann hoped explaining the design of their homework machine would require Tony and Steve to focus on the process as well as their final product. The assignment was intended to encourage students to examine their thinking, scrutinize their decision-making process, and assess their own work (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). In writing about the process

Tony and Steve used reading and writing as tools for communication, rather than as skills to be learned and transferred (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

### Making Connections

Reading and writing continued to be tools for learning as Ann introduced the first broad unit of study: poetry. She began the second day of school with three essential questions: "What is art?;" "What is a poem?;" and, "Who is a poet?" Ann and her class linked information and strategies from language, science, social studies, and mathematics in a web of purposeful and meaningful studies extending over an entire month.

They began by looking at patterns in poetry. Using poetry books Ann brought from the public library as resources, students devoured everything from the humorous verses of Shel Silverstein, a favorite of Tony's, to more difficult works by Longfellow and Kipling. Each student contributed one original poem to a class book of poetry and published an individual poetry book. Individual poetry books included a biography of a favorite poet and several of the author's poems as well as a collection of original poems.

Patterns in poetry. As Ann introduced poetic patterns, poetry became another way for students to communicate their

thoughts and feelings with authentic audiences. One of the first patterns in poetry the class studied was cinquain, a five-line poem using nouns, adjectives, and verbs to create a two, four, six, eight, two syllable pattern. Following a series of mini-lessons on parts of speech and cinquain, Tony wrote a cinquain about friendship. It read:

Friendship  
true caring, loveig, helping  
sherg mtreats  
funny inside  
bodies

Tony's understanding of the structure of cinquain and ability to apply what he had learned was evident in the explanation of cinquain he wrote in his learning log. It stated:

Cinquain  
smol on the top  
big in the metl  
bigr in the metl

The final cinquain poem he wrote followed the prescribed pattern by beginning and ending with nouns that had nearly the same meaning. His second and third lines also followed

the pattern including adjectives and verbs respectively.  
Tony's final cinquain read:

House  
big, wide  
cooking, partying, cleaning  
This house is warm  
cottage

With each activity in the poetry unit, Ann reinforced what students had learned and provided opportunities for them to make new connections. After mini-lessons on parts of speech and free verse, Ann asked students to use what they had learned to write a poem about an animal. Students were to find an animal on the playground and record words to describe the how the animal looked and behaved. Tony constructed a list of verbs and adjectives describing a butterfly he saw on the playground.

What I'm looking for  
btrflie  
2 achon words about my choice  
flie crol [crawl]  
in the fild, yellow  
black, hi hi, wok [walk] on the grs [grass]



The next day Tony used his notes to construct a free verse about the butterfly. He wrote:

The butterfly

The butterfly

flies so

high beneath

the sky.

It was

scared when

I came

towards it. It

was yellow

and black.

It was

a pretty

scene.

Tony's poem about the butterfly integrated his observations of scientific phenomena, his knowledge of action and descriptive words, and his understanding of free verse.

On Monday of the second week of school, Ann asked students to make a list of everything they had learned up to this point about poetry and patterns. Tony's learning log entry connected patterns and poetry to his everyday world.

Summarizing his learning he wrote:

Pattern in Poetry, 9/13/93

1. poettey is a wrk of art.
2. wot I lrd about padrn, evrthg is pattern
3. if I cood be a powd evrbd cood be a powds.

How are patterns used in awr wrould

1. The wrld is a big padrn
2. The flow are a padr
3. clos are a padrn
4. car is a padrn

Number patterns. Ann used students' explanations of patterns in poetry as a springboard to expand the discussion to other kinds of patterns. After several students, including Tony, shared their learning log entries with the rest of the class, Ann wrote the numbers 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 16 on the overhead. "Poetry isn't the only thing that has patterns," she explained. "Numbers can have patterns too. What is the pattern [in these numbers]?" she asked the class. Working together the class identified the pattern of adding 1, then 2, then 3, then 4 and so on to complete the sequence.

Having identified number patterns as a large group, Ann

wanted students to create their own number patterns. She divided students into small groups and explained what they were to do. "You [each group] are going to come up with patterns. Your group will give two patterns to another group. They will figure out the patterns and give them back to you. Your pattern," Ann reminded them, "must repeat itself."

Following some initial disagreements Tony, Serge, Abby, and Ethan sat on the floor next to Ann's desk and began to work on their patterns. "Let's use odd numbers," Serge suggested or "count by fours," said Tony. "We'll start off with 5," Abby explained as she wrote 5, 9, 13. Tony also began with five and wrote 5, 4, 5, 4. Looking at both patterns Serge said, "Let's just do hers [Abby's]." Tony copied Abby's pattern and began a second pattern of his own. He wrote 13, 13, 21, 62, erased it, and wrote 13, 13, 13, 13, 13. "Let's just use hers [Abby's] again," Serge suggested. Tony shrugged. He crossed out all three patterns, wadded the paper into a ball and threw it in the trash (See Figure 22).

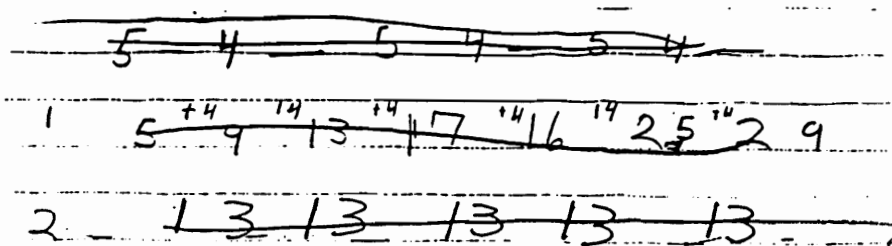


Figure 22. Number patterns Tony crossed out and threw away.

Tony's group did not explore why some patterns worked and others did not. Neither did they discuss the complexity of the different patterns. Serge offered no justification for selecting Abby's pattern over other options. Watching the groups' interaction, suggested that members were not of equal status: Abby's patterns were considered *better*; Serge decided which patterns the group would share. Tony's status in the group may have been related to his identification in fourth grade as a non-reader and non-writer. The status of group members became the basis for expectations, affected interactions, and frustrated Tony's participation and learning (Cohen, 1986).

As the groups finished, they traded patterns. Tony, Serge, Abby and Ethan tackled the two patterns they were given. One was "easy" they said, "just counting by fives." The other was more difficult. Stuck, they went to Ann for help. Ann asked them to explain what they had done. Rather than telling the group where they made a mistake, Ann listened and asked questions until they discovered their own error. Explaining the sequence, Abby said the difference between 12 and 17 was 6. Recognizing their computational error, Abby and Serge were able to complete the sequence with little difficulty. Tony listened as Abby and Serge worked through the pattern with Ann, but did not contribute to the discussion.

Later Ann asked students to make up a sequence independently and record it in their learning log. "Write patterns in math. Underneath that think of a very easy sequence for you and write about six numbers in that sequence. You may want to add three, take away two...." As Ann moved around the room watching students' work, Tony wrote then erased. He did not respond when Ann asked students to raise their hands if they had thought of a sequence.

Stopping beside his desk, Ann asked Tony about his pattern and showed him the sequence Serge had written. Tony wrote 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3. Above and between the 1 and 3 he wrote +3. "If you started with 1," Ann asked, "how would you get to 3?" "I'd add 2," Tony replied. Erasing the +3, Tony wrote +2 above and between each 1 and 3. Tony's opportunities to learn about number patterns were not limited by his work with Ethan, Serge, and Abby. The fluidity and flexibility of Ann's classroom provided a range of experiences and interactions. Talking with Ann individually reinforced Tony's large and small group work with number patterns. In his learning log he summarized what he had done by saying: "I skip the sem [same] nombrs."

The following day, Ann extended students' experiences with patterns to include number patterns they could discover using calculators. Tony studied the following the equations

to determine the pattern:

$$3 \times 7 \times 8 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 888888$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 3 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 333333$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 7 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 777777$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 5 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 555555$$

Tony decided the answer would be the third number repeated six places. Using the calculator to add each series of numbers, he learned that the pattern changed when the third number was ten or over. He tried all the numbers between 11 and 19 and recorded his answers in his learning log. He wrote:

$$3 \times 7 \times 10 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 1111110$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 11 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 94017$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 14 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 1555554$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 15 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 1666665$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 16 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 1777776$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 12 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 1333332$$

$$3 \times 7 \times 20 \times 11 \times 13 \times 37 = 2222220$$

Looking over his shoulder Ann encouraged Tony to check his answers. "Do you see a pattern?" she asked. "Do all your answers fit the pattern?" Summarizing his observations in his learning log, he wrote:

I thik that calculator aer owae  
to fon nit pattern

Ann's questions urged Tony to identify and explain the pattern. She also encouraged him to look for discrepancies, answers that did not seem to fit. Tony had a very different looking number when he tried 11. Even though the pattern for the numbers 12 through 19 looked very similar, Tony did not question his answer for the number 11.

Patterns in nature. Two weeks into the poetry unit Ann used a picture book to expand conversations they were having about patterns in nature. The book, *Someone is Eating the Sun* introduced the science concept of eclipse. "Today," Ann stated, "we're going to take the things about the shadows and the sun and the moon and we're going to go in a lot of different directions. I'm going to start off by reading to you *Someone Is Eating the Sun*." When she finished reading Ann asked, "What scientific phenomenon do you think this book is talking about?"

"They think someone is eating the sun and that it has a big hole in it." Kim answered. "But then they discover that it's not."

"Oh, it's an eclipse," Steve remarked.

As she read the book, Ann tied in examples of literary forms they had studied in conjunction with the poetry unit. "Flippity, flap, and a flutter. What is that?" she asked.

"Alliteration," Tony answered.

"Could it also be onomatopoeia?" Ann asked

"Yes," said Kim "because the words sound like the sound."

"It was personification too," chimed in Brian.

"Why it was personification?"

"Animals can't talk," Abby replied.

The conversation continued as Ann and the students linked the book to things they had learned about language and poetry.

Ann planned to read the book *Someone Is Eating the Sun*, have a short discussion on eclipses, and follow up with a shadow activity integrating math and science. Working in groups, students were to record the length and position of their shadows at 10:30, 12:30 and 2:30. Standing with their heels to the same line each time, students discovered that shadows shortened and then lengthened. Having to shift the position of their paper to trace their shadow helped students realize how the position of their shadow changed. The activity prompted predictions and explanations.

The students' enthusiasm extended the learning beyond Ann's initial expectations. They drew conclusions about the pattern of change they observed between 10:30 and 2:30. But, they wanted to know, would the pattern be the same on a different day? Students decided to follow the same procedure at the same three times the following week. The



45-minute science lesson became a week-long opportunity for predicting, comparing, estimating, and writing. Tony's paragraph and answers to the questions Ann asked summarized his learning. He wrote:

I pred shadow  
I got bigr and siftid to  
the cornr of the pmpr

1. How did the shadow change?

The shadows moov beekos the sun moov in  
a difrt dreshon [direction]

2. Was there a pattern in the shadows movement?

Yes there was a pattern The sun moov in a  
difret dreshn from the sun

As students completed the shadow activity there were questions about the movement of the earth, the moon, and the sun. Ann and the students explored possibilities and built a foundation of shared understanding (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). "This will be our introduction to finding out about scientific phenomenon," Ann began. "Would you please get out your learning logs? We're going to start today doing some research. The title will be The Earth, the Sun, and the Moon. This will drive us. Make two columns. In the first column write: 'What I know.' In the second column

write: 'What I want to know.' Do this individually right now. Write down everything that comes to your mind...."

When students had recorded thoughts in their learning logs, Ann asked them to share what they had written with the class. Ideas were recorded on a large sheet of bulletin board paper taped to the blackboard. "The earth is round and rotates around the sun," Kevin said to begin the discussion.

"[It] spins in a clockwise direction. When it gets dark, the earth is turned away from the sun," Ethan added.

"How many of you have ever heard the phrase 'the sun goes down?'" Ann asked building on Ethan's comment. "Does the whole earth turn away from the sun at the same time?"

"When our side is light," Kim explained, "the other side is dark."

"The earth is tilted," Serge suggested.

Ann occasionally added her thoughts to those of the group. Participating allowed her to insert ideas and build on concepts she believed to be important (Cazden, 1988; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). "I'm going to put that word 'tilted' in quotation marks," she explains, "because much depends on the tilt of the earth."

The brainstorming session continued as students shared what they knew about the earth, the moon, and the sun. Occasionally the information students provided was

inaccurate: "The earth is the only planet with light." "The moon makes night," or "The earth's galaxy has 9 planets." In such instances Ann reminded students that all answers were acceptable in a brainstorming session. "We don't say that's wrong or that information is not right. As you do your research ... you may find information that disagrees." Contributions ranged from Tony's descriptive "[The] sun is a fireball" to Mike's "The sun is so far away it would take 125 light years to drive there." Each suggestion allowed Ann to assess the nature of students' understanding and prior knowledge (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

After students had shared what they already knew about the earth, moon, and sun, Ann redirected the discussion to uncover things they wanted to know (Cazden, 1988; Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). "One of the first questions I'd want to ask," Ann noted, "[would be] What is a light year? What else do we want to know about the earth, the sun, and the moon?" Ann was not looking for predetermined right answers. Instead, she encouraged students to identify questions that were interesting or important to them. Many of the questions were speculative, like Nancy's "What would happen if you got too close to the sun?" or Tony's "Is there life on other planets?" Other questions such as Abby's "Why does the moon change size?" or Tony's "How fast does light travel?" had specific answers.

Each question provided the basis for research.

The discussion of what they knew and what they wanted to know served as a starting point for future learning. Over the next three weeks students in Ann's class conducted research to answer one of the questions listed under what they wanted to know. Ann's willingness to follow students' interest illustrated her commitment to sharing some of the responsibility for learning with her class (Cazden, 1988; Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). "I like to think of the kids as our partners in education," she told her colleagues during an inservice meeting in the fall of 1993. She explained:

You're not just going to sit back and read the newspaper while they work or write your plans for the next week. You're ... going to provide them with everything they need in that classroom. You become a partner with them as a learner.

You never learn as much as you do when you sit around the table and say "May I join in?" and they say "Ms. McMann, did you know this?" You learn so much that you didn't know. They see you as a learner. If you know everything, then they see you just as their teacher. You want them to see you as their partner. So you learn along with them.

### Making Choices About His Own Learning.

As a partner in his own learning, Tony often had the freedom to choose who he worked with, subjects he wanted to learn more about, and how he presented his work. An assignment to do research on a "critter" [animal] allowed Tony to learn more about tigers and share what he learned by writing a poem. As part of a unit on caves Tony read about vampire bats and wrote a report. Following the brainstorming session on the earth, moon, and sun, Tony and four other boys did research on the sun. What they learned became part of a video they shared with the class. In each case Ann allowed Tony to make choices based on his interests. He was encouraged and expected to assume a measure of responsibility for his own learning.

Spelling. Ann gave students opportunities to control their own learning in other ways too. She asked Tony and his classmates to identify spelling-vocabulary words based on their interests and needs they identified by looking at their writing. "Look at your ... learning log and journal," she told students. "They can help you decide which words you want to learn how to spell. Pick words you know you have misspelled or had trouble with in your writing." Identifying words he would like to use in his writing brought meaning and purpose to Tony's spelling-vocabulary

activities. Because the words were drawn from his own writing, Tony had ownership (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Routman, 1991).

After looking at his learning log and journal in early November 1993, Tony chose the words "glass," "after," and "play" as three of his spelling words. Tony practiced his spelling words by completing two activities from the list Ann suggested. Options included creating a crossword puzzle or word search, finding synonyms, forming plurals, or looking up definitions. On the spelling test Tony was required to spell his words correctly and use each in a sentence. In the weeks following the spelling test, Tony used the words "after" and "play" when writing in his learning log and journal. Each time the words were spelled correctly. Tony's ability to use the words correctly in his writing suggested he had not just memorized the words for the test. Accurate spellings of the words in context indicated they had become part of his writing vocabulary.

By allowing students to choose spelling words from their own writing Ann conveyed several important messages. Rather than requiring students to learn a list of words she determined were important, Ann validated students' uniqueness as well as their ability to address their own instructional needs. Encouraging students to select spelling words by looking at their writing gave a purpose to

learning new words. Spelling words correctly made communicating easier and improved the likelihood readers would understand the writer's message. Ann provided students with an authentic audience and a meaningful reason for improving their spelling.

Reading. Tony's freedom to make choices about his own learning were not confined to spelling. Ann did not require the entire class to read the same novel. At times everyone was able to select what they wanted to read without restriction. Literature circles focused on what students liked about their books. They also discussed general topics such as theme and descriptive language. Sometimes students were required to select one of several books Ann identified about a particular topic. Literature circles then became an opportunity for students reading the same book to address topics such as plot or character development.

Though I had observed and participated in literature circles on a regular basis between the beginning of the year and December 1993, the most meaningful example of Tony's participation in this activity occurred when I returned to the classroom for two days in early March 1994. Immersed in an extended study of the Civil War, students in Ann's class were reading novels about historic figures of the period.

Tony and several other students were reading Frederick Douglass Fights for Freedom by Margaret Davidson.

To integrate reading and writing, Ann asked students to write letters to her and to classmates about their books. They could share their favorite part, ask questions, or explain how they felt about the book (Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1992). Tony wrote letters to two of his classmates and to Ann.

Dear B,

I inchord [enjoyed] this book[.] it reminds me of  
andr grand ralrade [underground railroad][.] I  
like this book[.] the slaves live in a shack[.]  
Please tell me wiy people tret slaves so bad[.]

Your friend,

Tony

Dear Mrs. McMann,

frederick was a cweck [quick] lrnr. Mrs. McMann  
why dos whites tret blacks so bad[?] I felt like  
just to bet the whites up.

Your friend,

Tony

The students and Ann responded to Tony's letters. Ann tried to answer Tony's questions, validated his opinions, and



shared her own thoughts about the book or an issue Tony raised.

Dear Tony,

Can you believe the way some people treated the Black people? The thing that is hard for me to believe is that a horse was worth more than a slave.

Tell me your favorite part.

Love,

Mrs. McMann

Dear B,

Why dos whites treat Blacks so bad[?] I'm on page 29. I am taking my time. Frederick was a fast learner. Blacks wasn't allowed to read and to right. Are you enjoying your book?

Sencerly your friend,

Tony

In each letter Tony focused on details from the story: "the slaves live in a shack;" "Frederick was a quick learner;" and "blacks weren't allowed to read." Through the letters Tony shared his feelings about the book and the plight of African-American slaves: "I'm enjoying this book;"

"I like this book;" and "I feel so bad[,] I feel like just beating the whites up." Tony engaged the reader and involved them in his learning process by asking questions. "Please tell me why people treat slaves so bad?" "Why do whites treat Blacks so bad?" "Are you enjoying your book?" Tony's letters reflected his interest in and understanding of the book as well as his growth as a reader and a writer.

Tony's letters also showed the improvement in his skills. Each letter contained the three parts of a friendly letter: greeting, body, and closing. He used capital letters correctly in the greeting of each letter, in the closing of one letter, and in the title of his book. His use of punctuation had improved. He placed a comma at the end of the greeting and concluded most sentences appropriately with either a period or question mark. Being able to use invented spelling provided the freedom and security necessary for Tony to take risks and become a fluent writer.

Tony's contribution to the discussion of Frederick Douglas Fighter for Freedom in the literature circle also reflected his growth as a reader. "Frederick Douglass was born a slave," Billy said to start the discussion. "He wanted to know why he didn't have a last name."

"He wanted to know his birthday," Tony added. "He didn't want to work for a white man."

"He asked the cook and other people why he was born a slave," Billy explained.

"Miss Sophia taught Fred to read," Tony told the group. "He challenged this kid and said, 'Bet I can write faster than you.' so he could learn his letters. Miss Sophia's husband told her she was not supposed to teach any slaves. The worst thing was," Tony concluded, "slaves were not allowed to read and write."

In reading and writing about Frederick Douglass, Tony once again assumed responsibility for his own learning. Within the broad parameters Ann established, he determined when he read, where he read, and how he would respond to the book. Tony identified aspects of the book that were important to him and shared his thoughts with classmates and with Ann. Tony's learning was enhanced by his sense of ownership and the personal meaning he was encouraged to incorporate into the reading and writing experience (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

### Writing and Personal Meaning

Another way Ann encouraged students to assume ownership and bring personal meaning to their learning was through journals. Journal writing provided an opportunity for Tony to share his personal triumphs, thoughts, and experiences with Ann (McLane, 1990). Ann asked students to

write in their journals each night, Monday through Thursday. Students were not constrained by specific length or topic requirements. Journals were turned in once each week, on a day of the student's choosing, so Ann could read and respond to the entries. Seen as a way to express feelings and communicate with a real audience, journals were never corrected for punctuation, spelling, grammatical structure, or handwriting. In all cases Ann responded in a personal way, linking what the students had written to her own experiences or asking a question to show her interest.

Through his journal entries Ann discovered Tony's interests and connected with his out-of school life. She discovered what he liked to do, what was important to him, and how he felt about people or events. Tony's journal reflected the complexities of pre-adolescence. His entries range from the descriptions of a fishing trip and "the one that got away" to the emotions of young love and thoughts of marriage. An entry in late September 1993 focused on a fishing trip Tony had made with his family. He wrote:

#### My Sunday

Me and my brother and unckls whiee wet fishing[.]  
I dint cigh [catch] nothing[.] bot I had a big shtropr  
[striper][.] I say about 12-9 pons[.] Bot my fothr  
dint tiy the hoock[.] Thas woy I got a sonr[.]

In a series of entries in mid-December 1993 Tony talks about his girlfriend, Peaches. He wrote:

If I koad [could] kiss Peaches 1 mor time i wood  
be a verry hapy boy[.] [A]nd if I mare Peaches i  
wood be a good hasben and a good fathr to my cids[.]  
I wood take my cids to the zoo and the park[.] i  
wood tacke to chrj [church] evey day[.]

I wont 2 cids a boy and grls[,] 1 dog and a cat[.]  
for my haemoon I'll go to hawaii and swimming and  
the beaches git a nise tan[.]

Wat if peaches wasn't her[.] I wood be very sad[.]  
I wood be a flour with out watr and I love her  
very much[.]

Each entry offered Ann insights into Tony as a person with unique strengths, needs, and feelings.

By responding to Tony's entries in a personal way, Ann solidified their relationship of respect and caring (Atwell, 1987; Rief, 1992). Tony's entries about learning KungFu and Ann's responses provided an excellent example of the ongoing dialogue they had through the journal.

I lrnd a lot of thins in cong foow like in  
zapl a pote stans, a hroes stans and a soow

Dear Tony,

I'm interested in your taking karate. I took it for a while and learned self defense and what to do if someone grabbed my purse or attacked me from the back. Keep it up and teach me some moves.

Love,

Mrs. McMann

I lrnd som neew steps in cong foow too day[,]  
like the elgo[.] [T]hat is ol [all] I'm going  
to tel you becos Devet my tegyr [teacher]  
told me to not to tel enebote [anybody].

Dear Tony,

I'm interested in the reason David won't allow you to tell about Kungfu. Will you ask him?

Love,

Mrs. McMann

I lrnd too snap keck and a botrfiye [butterfly]  
and a hand stand.

I'm wrking on my block end then on my form[.]

Ann linked Tony's KungFu lessons with her experiences in a self-defense class. She validated Tony's expertise by saying "teach me some moves" and by asking questions to which she did not know the answers. Ann's questions and comments linked Tony's out-of-school experiences with the classroom and positioned Tony in the role of expert.

### Self-Assessment

Ann's desire to incorporate students' personal experiences into the learning process and to have students assume responsibility for their own learning led naturally to having students assess their own performance (Rief, 1990; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). "Self-evaluation is the most important [part] of student evaluation," Ann explained as she talked with other teachers in a faculty meeting at the beginning of the 1993-94 school year. Ann provided opportunities for students to regularly assess their own progress in a variety of ways. During the poetry unit Tony assessed his own understanding of poetry on three occasions.

The first self-assessment required students to answer "yes" or "no" in response to six questions (See Figure 33). Students did not have to give definitions or demonstrate understanding, only assess their own understanding by answering "yes" or "no." Ann collected the self-assessment for information but did not comment on it or correct it in

any way. Instead she used the insights to make instructional and curricular decisions. "The primary purpose of the self-assessment," Ann insisted, "was not for my benefit, but to prompt students to think about their own learning." In completing the first self-assessment Tony answered "yes" to all six questions. The self-assessment read:

**How Am I Doing With Poetry?** Name Tony Date 9/16/9

1. I have some good ideas about what poetry is. Yes  No
2. I can give two examples of how patterns are used in writing & math. Yes  No
3. I know the difference in rhythm and rhyme. Yes  No
4. I know the difference in prose. Yes  No
5. I know about cinquain. Yes  No
6. I know what personification is and can use it in poetry. Yes  No

In the second self-assessment Ann orally provided an example and students were to identify the poetic form. "If



I say 'my desk is a tremendous, tragedy of trash' it is what?" Ann explained, "[You] would write the appropriate word, in this case, alliteration, on [your] paper." Ann had students check their own papers. If they had all the answers correct they gave themselves an M for mastery. If they missed one or more they earned a T for trying. Ann asked students to write a sentence or two at the bottom of their sheet to justify the M or T (See Figure 23).

M

9/21/93 1:13

lyric and Narrative ✓

Prose ✓

Free Vets ✓

Personification ✓

Alliteration ✓

Idiom Cos I Wreck  
 Hero B Cos I Had  
 a Nos Tether

Figure 23. Tony's self-assessment.

Tony justified his M by saying he worked hard and had a nice teacher. He did not mention his understanding of poetic forms or the accuracy of his answers.

At the end of the third week of school, Ann asked students to get out their learning logs. "Put the title 'What I Remember.' Under the title," she explained, "write what you remember from our class last week. Write only words, no sentences. What words do you remember?" Tony wrote:

Wot I Remmedr

1. cngrrt [congruent]
2. free verse
3. psonunosnoson [personification]
4. collateral
5. alliteration
6. lyric and
7. loject [logic]

After giving the class several minutes to write, Ann asked Tony and other students to share. "I remember lyric and narrative," Tony responded.

Students suggested words related to math, science, and poetry. One of Tony's words, collateral, had been part of a conversation on the first day of school. The activity

encouraged students to think about what they had done the previous week and allowed Ann to assess what they remembered over the weekend. The self-assessment became a check point for students and Ann before they went on to new material and different topics of investigation.

Selecting items to be included in his portfolio at the first six-weeks grading period provided Tony with another opportunity to assess his own work. Students were required to include one poem and their "critter" report. The remaining six or more entries were student-selected. Ann asked students to write a letter to introduce their portfolio to readers and to attach a post-it to each entry explaining why it was selected. Tony's letter stated:

Dear redr,

I hop that you like my work and I pek my favrt wrk. This is wot I lrnd about in 5th grade.

The post-its Tony added to his assignment on place-value explained why he choose to include the piece in his portfolio (See Figure 25). Tony's reasons for choosing the place-value assignment were not complicated: he liked it and he thought it showed mastery. His comments did not address the specific content he learned, how the learning occurred, or how his work demonstrated mastery. The comments did, however, suggest that Tony was proud of his accomplishments.

Place Value Name Tony Date 11-5-93 Time 9:27

Write in standard form:

$$2000 + 500 + 60 + 2 = 2,562$$

$$3000 + 200 + 0 + 1 = 3,201$$

$$10,000 + 5,000 + 200 + 50 + 2 = 15,252$$

$$100,000 + 50,000 + 1,000 + 400 + 20 + 3 = 151423$$

$$1,000,000 + 40,000 + 2,000 + 600 + 70 + 1 = 1,402,671$$

Place on the Place Value Chart:  
(Bottom of page)

1. Ten million, three hundred twenty-five thousand, six hundred forty-nine.
2. Seventy thousand, two hundred forty-nine.
3. Seventeen thousand, four hundred sixty-seven.

When you have finished the chart, write the words in standard form.

1. 10,325,642                      2. 70,249                      3. 17,465

	B.	M.	th.	O.
①	10	325	642	
②			70,249	
③			17,467	

Place Value 11:5193  
I like this paper  
I think I mastered  
it

Figure 24. Portfolio with explanation of selection.

Ann did not use students' self-assessments as scores to be recorded in a grade book and averaged to determine a mark for a report card. The self-assessments, she asserted, "were intended to build students' self-esteem." Self-assessments, she believed, "helped students identify what they know and where they need to work." Ann described how she used the students' self-assessments by saying, "... I don't take the papers up. I don't grade those papers. The children see in their responses whether or not they understand what free verse is." Assessment for Ann was an ongoing part of the instructional process. Providing opportunities for students to assess their own learning, benefited the students. It also allowed Ann to continuously monitor progress, evaluate students' understanding and adjust her instructional program.

Not all Tony's self-assessments were initiated by Ann. Evidence that Tony continuously assessed his own progress occurred in his conversations with others and appeared in his writing. Tony's self-initiated assessments focused on how he thought he was doing in school or his behavior in class, rather than specific content he had learned. He evaluated his behavior and performance by saying he thought he was "doing good." In his journal he wrote:

I think I'm doing good on my crsef [cursive]

After reading a book about tigers with one of the volunteers in the library, Tony wrote a journal entry that assessed his learning. He wrote:

Today I lrnd about togrs[.] I no now  
wot I dint no thn[.] I lrd about togrs  
becos thr a grate hbtath [habitat] and a gret  
spisis [species]. I get red a good storry[.]  
This is the most funy thing I thais [think]

Tony assessed his growth saying, "I know now what I didn't know then." This self-assessment focused on his learning. He explained that he was interested in tigers "because they are ... a great species." He also explored how he learned. Referring to an article about tigers a library volunteer read to him, Tony said, "I got read a good story."

With each self-assessment, whether initiated by Ann or Topny, he reviewed what he knew, reflected on his understanding, and gained confidence in himself as an able, literate learner. Activities such as literature circles and journal writing created an environment in which Tony felt successful. Sharing responsibility for learning in the context of a trusting, caring relationship with Ann made Tony more willing to take risks. In the context of Ann's fifth grade class, an assessment of Tony as capable and as a reader and writer was produced.

## Reflecting on the Context for Literate-Learning

On the first day of the 1993-94 school year, Tony suggested that "respecting other people" would be a good class rule. Also on the first day he commented during a class discussion that the word "collateral" had something to do with "loaning" and wrote a poem in his journal. The poem read:

rosis Aer Red vilt blue[.] I love you  
Rosis Aer Red vilt blue[.] Noteng can  
tack my love for you[.]

As I gathered my things to leave at the end of the first day of the 1993-94 school year, Ann said, "Tony had a good day, don't you think? He added a lot to the class. He's a capable kid."

In the context of Ann's fifth grade classroom Tony was an able, literate-learner. Ann's assessment of Tony, I believed, was related to the nature of her expectations and interactions with him as well as the shape of the literate curriculum in her class. The structure of Ann's fifth grade classroom invited and encouraged Tony to actively participate in a literate community of readers and writers.

### Expectations and Interactions: Releasing Control

Throughout the fall of the 1993-94 school year and

again in a follow-up interview in March 1994, Ann expressed her belief that Tony's performance in her class was related to her expectations. "I think Tony has done well because I've expected a lot," she explained. "He has risen to my expectations (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1980). He can sit down now and read Frederick Douglass and have a conversation about that. A lot of these kids have just never had much expected of them." Ann's belief in Tony's ability to live up to her high expectations was evident in her willingness to allow him to make choices and assume responsibility for his own learning.

Ann began the year by giving Tony choices about whether he used cursive or manuscript writing, what he wanted to write a poem about, who he wanted to work with, and where his group wanted to work. During an interview in mid-September 1993, she explained:

... at the beginning of the year I don't ... say "What would you like to learn?" It's a gradual process. And as you continue on, [you're] increasing the choices. My real goal... is [to] open it up so that they have total choice in what they learn.

Releasing control and allowing choices gave Tony a sense of purpose and of shared ownership in the classroom and what happened there (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).



Giving Tony choices and control over his learning did not mean Ann abdicated responsibility (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Ann's role in structuring the classroom was not passive. "You don't just turn them loose and let them go," she explained. Ann compared giving students control with sharing the front seat of a car with students.

I like to think of them [students] as a partner.  
... my children and I are in the front seat of a vehicle together. I'm the driver. It's my vehicle. I'm responsible for that vehicle, if it had a flat tire, if we wreck, if we get hurt.... And I want to make sure ... none of that happens. So even though we're all in the front seat together, it's still my vehicle.

As the "driver" Ann frequently initiated learning. She planned the broad outline of the unit on poetry, introduced the shadow activity, incorporated the book *Someone is Eating the Sun*, and provided time for Tony to pursue questions about the earth, moon, and sun. Tony used reading and writing to communicate with real audiences for meaningful purposes. Ann created authentic contexts for Tony's learning and participated with him in identifying and meeting his needs.

Ann's role did not end once she introduced an idea and

initiated the learning. She continually observed, assessed, and documented Tony's learning, providing support and resources as they were needed. Through observation and conversation Ann assessed Tony's understanding and recognized his potential. "I do a lot of 'kid watching,'" she explained (Goodman, 1982). She stated:

I do a lot of Tony's assessing orally. A lot of times I know [he] knows what he's talking about but he just has not had that much experience [with print] and he can't write it. So I talk to him a lot. I assess him every time I talk with him. When he's working in a group I listen to his contributions. It also seems that when he has to write something that doesn't limit his participation. They [other students] will help him.

Ann observed as Tony worked independently to enter his poems into the computer or as he interacted with his friends to plan a presentation about the sun. She listened as he took a leadership role in making a visual display for the hall and when he explained to a student who had been absent the concept of rounding. She created opportunities for Tony to communicate with real audiences for meaningful purposes. Ann constructed an environment in which Tony had opportunities to exhibit what he was capable of doing

independently and what he could do with the support of human and technological resources (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Werstch, 1991).

Through observation, questioning, and reflection, Ann identified Tony's zone of proximal development and mediated opportunities for his further growth and learning (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). On a paper Tony completed in early December, Ann documented his understanding of regrouping and how his learning had progressed (See Figure 25). A visual representation of what Tony could do independently, the paper helped Ann determine ways she could support his growth and build his understanding in the future.

Several times between September and December 1993, Ann made instructional decisions based on her assessment of Tony's understanding and how his learning was progressing. Having watched Tony and three other boys use a supermarket flyer to practice estimating and rounding in mid-October, Ann realized Tony was having trouble. Bending over beside his desk she worked through several examples of rounding and estimating with him. She asked questions to assess where he was in his thinking and to determine how she could best support his learning.

12-8-93

(1)  $\overline{24.97}$   
 $\underline{-11.33}$

(2)  $\overline{85.16}$   
 $\underline{-17.73}$

This is the first work with regrouping that [Tony] did. He still uses his fingers and devised his own system for counting. He understands decimals

being lined up for adding & sub. He can write in column form a decimal, originally written ~~as~~ <sup>as an</sup> equation.

He is so interested in this, and it has been wonderful watching his progress from simple sub. to the complex regrouping of decimals. [Tony] not only can sub decimals, he also reads the decimal correctly.

Figure 25.

Ann's documentation and analysis of Tony's understanding of regrouping.

Ann related her examples to Tony's experiences figuring out prices and paying for purchases at local stores. Finally, she introduced another group task that allowed Tony to build on his work with her by interacting with others. Ann used observations, questioning and reflection to assess where Tony was, where he was capable of going, and how she might best support his learning.

Optimal learning, Goodman and Goodman (1990) suggest, occurs when teaching supports and facilitates "without controlling, distorting, or thwarting the learning" (p.236). Ann mediated Tony's learning by asking questions, listening to his explanations, responding to his ideas, and introducing skills in the context of his reading and writing. "You can tell when you're talking to a child whether he understands or not," she explains. "And [if he doesn't] you're going back, ... regroup and start over. I have Tony in my class ... [and] I'm sensitive to his needs." Though she shared her own knowledge, Ann also recognized the importance of Tony relating new knowledge to what he already knew and developing his own strategies. She provided enough support to assist and extend his learning but not program or control it (Goodman & Goodman, 1990).

### The Literate Curriculum

Recognizing that students learn best when they're

encouraged to make personally meaningful connections between new knowledge and their prior experiences and to assume responsibility for their own learning, Ann removed many of the artificial constraints associated with the transmission model of traditional schooling (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). In her classroom the school day was divided into two or three large blocks of time, rather than fragmented forty-five or fifty minute periods. "Being a facilitator frees you," she commented during an interview in mid-September. She explained:

We have our time at the beginning of the day or when we come back from PE; we'll do our math. Then the next time [we stop] will be lunch time. And then the next time [we stop] will be time to go home. So our day is not broken down....

Learning in Ann's classroom was integrated and interrelated rather than separated into individual subjects. Discussions about patterns in poetry led easily to patterns in math and science. Observations of scientific phenomenon were presented in the form of free verse and required an understanding of parts of speech. Reading and writing were an integral part of work in all content areas and skill instruction grew out of that context. Ann explained:

We would have mini-lessons. We would sit around the table and talk .... It could be a whole group. It could be a small group. But that's when you teach them a skill that they need right now. [Y]ou don't wait until ... you get to page 400 in the book to teach quotation [marks]. If you need it now, you do it now.

Tradebooks, magazines, newspapers, people, and computer networks displaced basal readers and textbooks as primary resources. Students were urged to participate in literacy events, to use language as a tool for communication and to take risks (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1988, 1990, 1993).

Ann realized giving students increasingly greater control over their own learning involved risks. Returning to her metaphor of driving, Ann explained, "You have a stronger physical structure ... than you do in a traditional classroom. As a traditional teacher you are ... in that front seat by yourself and those kids are in the back seat. You're the driver all the time." Using another metaphor, Ann elaborated on the gradual release of control and the risks involved. She said:

You have to give them as much as they can handle at any given time. It's like teaching a child, a baby to walk. You don't expect him to walk across the room the

first time. ... there are lots of falls, there are lots of risks that you take. So in becoming a partner with these children there are many risks that you take and many times you have to start over."

Willing to take risks herself, Ann wanted students to be risk-takers also. During a follow-up interview in March 1994 Ann talked about Tony and the progress he had made in her class. "Tony's a reader and a writer. He's not afraid [to try]. I hope I've created a classroom where he can take risks." Ann constructed an environment in which Tony was willing and able to become an active part of the community of readers and writers.

#### Community of Readers and Writers

An important ingredient in the process of becoming a reader and writer is the opportunity to participate in an active community of readers and writers (Gundlach, 1983). The author states:

If a person participates in a community of active readers and writers, if he reads and writes regularly, and if his reading and writing put him in touch with other people, he stands a reasonably good chance of forming notions of genre and style, of developing a general sense of the literary enterprise, and of



becoming increasingly sophisticated about the act of writing itself.... (pp. 185-186)

Beginning the first day of school Ann provided opportunities for Tony to participate in the classroom community of readers and writers. By asking students to share something about themselves with the class she took the initial step toward establishing a classroom cohesiveness. Through the mixer she confirmed that everyone was valued and had something of interest to contribute. The mixer encouraged students to get to know each other, to work together, and to begin to view the classroom as a community of learners.

Tony was a part of the community of learners. Ann did not assign Tony pages in the first and second grade workbooks sent from fourth grade. His desk, like everyone else's held a fifth grade math book. Ann did not ask someone to help Tony spell words or offer to let him dictate. She told everyone that she was more interested in what they had to say than in their spelling. Beginning on the first day of school, Ann believed in Tony's potential and created an environment in which he could participate as a reader and a writer.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PARTICIPATION, PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES:

#### ASSESSMENT IN SUPPORT OF LEARNING

Our task ... is to try to understand the complexity of the literacy behaviors of ... children, and ... to use these understandings to support and enhance children's learning opportunities.  
Denny Taylor, *From the Child's Point of View*

To recognize the role of perspective and vantage point, to recognize at the same time that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, is to recognize that no accounting, ... can ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility.  
Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*

Tony sat in a darkened room with the rest of his fifth grade class in early October 1993, and watched the television as basketball superstar Michael Jordan announced his retirement. After the news conference Ann McMann asked students why they thought Jordan retired. Tony raised his hand and when Ann called on him said, "He lost his ... desire to do the game. He had to decide how much did he gain [by playing] and how much did he lose." Following the discussion Ann asked students to record their feelings about Jordan's retirement in their journals. Tony wrote:

I was sad wen Jorden went up to the mike. He wotid [wanted] to spen mor time with his famley.

I think about Tony's contribution to the class discussion and his journal entry whenever I think about him. I recall his perceptive sensitivity and his ability to express his feelings orally and in writing. I remember too, descriptions of him as "unable to read or write" and recall the contents of the Confidential Category II file that reduced his literate abilities to the word "borderline." Previous chapters described assessments of Tony's performance and literate ability in the socially constructed frameworks in which they occurred. Tony's story made "visible the invisible social processes of classroom life" and the educational policies in which assessments of his literate ability and learning were embedded (Green, Weade, & Graham, 1988).

In this chapter I synthesize threads of analysis introduced in earlier chapters and propose a different way of thinking about assessment. I address the unequal power relationships inherent in traditional forms of assessment and explore the ways power differences might be minimized. I examine the uni-directional nature of standardized tests and most classroom assessments. I explore the possibilities offered by self-assessments incorporated into alternative practices such as portfolios, performance tasks, and exhibitions.

I suggest that assessment should support instruction

and explore students' potential rather than test fossilized facts students have "learned." Assessment then becomes a form of inquiry. I extend current thinking by proposing co-participatory, multi-directional assessment practices that create nurturing spaces for learning. I argue for a multi-perspectival approach to assessment that situates the learner's performance and literate development in the social, cultural, and institutional context.

### **Traditional Assessments: Snapshots of Literate-Learning**

Traditional assessments measure students' ability to recall and recite, either orally or in writing, information previously transmitted. Such assessments focus on what students know or have learned in terms of discrete facts and ascertain competency based on students' ability to duplicate a single right answer. Student performance is compared to established norms or existing criteria and ranked on a hierarchical continuum. Presuming to measure individual mental functioning, traditional assessments structure students' educational opportunities, define students' access to resources, and have significant consequences for students' lives. Reductive and oversimplified, traditional evaluative procedures look only at individual accomplishments and locate "problems" in-the-head of the learner.

Focused on the individual learner, traditional assessments are uni-directional events in which the teacher looks at the student. A snapshot metaphor helps me define the limitations of such assessment practices. In assessing performance as in taking a photograph, the lens through which the scene is viewed influences what is seen. A wide angle lens gives a different perspective than a zoom lens. A tele-photo attachment offers a different image than a close-up lens. Multi-image or bi-color filters added to the lens influence the final outcome, as do the expertise and creative objectives of the photographer.

Like the photographer, teachers and education policymakers focus the assessment lens on what they want to see. When the assessment lens focused on pages in *Explode the Code*, Tony's unfamiliarity with phonetic patterns and his use of developmental spelling were evident. Focusing the assessment lens on standardized tests defined the limits of Tony's school-oriented "sight" vocabulary, his "difficulty integrating design parts to form a whole," his inability to punctuate decontextualized phrases correctly, and his "significant perceptual motor delay." Neither the assignments he completed as a fourth grader nor standardized tests revealed Tony's use of print to construct stories, to build and maintain social relationships, to meet the needs of his everyday life, and to solve problems. Neither the

assessments of his classwork nor his scores on standardized tests communicated his ability to use resources and collaborate with others to construct meaning. The class assignments and the standardized tests failed to explore what Tony could do independently or what he was capable of accomplishing with the support of human or technological resources.

### Beyond the Photograph's Edges

Photographs in which tourists dress up in period costumes and pose against a backdrop with appropriate props, allow me to push the analogy further. Tinted to appear old, the finished photograph looks real. Yet the "reality" pictured is only an illusion. Once the photograph has been taken the tourists change into street clothes and resume their lives outside the studio. Although the images produced appear authentic, conclusions based on the photograph are incomplete or inaccurate. Without knowing the context and setting beyond the focus of the camera lens the situation cannot be accurately assessed.

Interactions and experiences outside the classroom or testing environment are very much a part of a student's life and must be drawing into classroom activities. Tony's interactions with his peers on the basketball court, his interest in cars, and his expertise with video games were

not acknowledged or incorporated into assessments of his literate ability as a fourth grader or in the special education evaluation. Reducing the focus of the lens to tasks Tony completed in class and his performance on standardized tests produced assessments of Tony as a non-reader and non-writer with borderline ability.

### Controlling the Shot

A snapshot metaphor also exposes the unequal power relationships inherent in traditional assessments. The photographer has control of the photographic situation and can vary elements of the shoot as well as what is done with the negatives. Subjects being photographed can respond to the photographer but have very little (if any) control over the final picture, its distribution or interpretation. The photographer's goals and interests are paramount. Likewise the goals and interests of teachers and education policymakers dominate traditional assessment practices. Grant Wiggins (1993) argues that traditional assessments "*are intrinsically prone to sacrifice ... the student's interests for the test maker's*" (original emphasis) (p.4).

Tony had little control over the literate curriculum, the instructional tasks, or the assessment practices that defined him as a non-reader and non-writer in the fourth grade. As illustrated by his writing on *Whipping Boy* or

*Phoebe the Spy*, Tony's thoughts were not necessarily acknowledged or valued. The ideas Tony dictated to others were reformulated until they reflected correct conclusions, accurate sequencing, and acceptable sentence structure based on someone else's standards. Conversations intended to model and support Tony's learning clearly placed the teacher in control of language. Scaffolding provided in fourth grade communicated what knowledge the teacher valued rather than supporting Tony as he constructed meaning. As an observer I wondered how much (if at all) the scaffolding provided in fourth grade assisted Tony's learning.

Identified as a non-reader and non-writer, Tony had little control over the events and interactions that defined his position or status in his fourth grade class. Being immersed in the fourth grade made him a part of the group. Even as a part of the classroom group Tony was marginalized. Memorizing flashcards, completing pages in *Explode the Code*, and working in a second grade math book set Tony apart from his peers and reinforced his marginalized position. Tony had little, if any, control over the organizational or instructional elements of his fourth grade class which separated him from the community of active readers and writers.

Tony had even less control over the special education evaluation process that assessed his ability as



"borderline." Education policymakers decided what would be assessed, how it would be assessed, and what counted as evidence of understanding or accomplishment. Tony had no role in determining who administered the tests, the environment in which tests were given, or the time frame during which the testing occurred. Although involved with him on a day-to-day basis, neither Tony's teacher nor his parents participated in decisions about the tests administered as part of the special education evaluation process. Tony and his parents had no control over what was done with test results, how the scores were interpreted, or the influence the assessments would have on his educational future.

The instructional program in his fourth grade class and the special education evaluation offered a limited view of Tony's literate ability and learning. Like snapshots, the assessments produced pictures of what Tony could do on particular tasks, under unique circumstances, at specific moments in time. Alternative forms of assessment introduced in his fifth grade class offered a more comprehensive profile of what Tony could do. They allowed him some control in determining what counted as evidence of his understanding and encouraged him to reflect on his own learning.

## **Alternative Assessments: Windows into Literate-Learning**

Realizing the limited view of student performance provided by traditional assessments and the reductive picture represented by test scores, increasing numbers of teachers and policymakers support the use of alternative assessments such as portfolios, performance tasks, and exhibitions. Like a one-way observation window, alternative assessment practices limit the view of individuals on either side to a single direction. On one side, teachers and policymakers look through the window at student performance and accomplishment. On the opposite side, simultaneously, the mirror reflects images and students have an opportunity to look at themselves. The window metaphor implies alternative assessments are not focused on a single event, but include a wide range of accomplishments.

A writing portfolio offered Ann a richer picture of Tony's literate ability than his scores on sections of the SBS that asked him to distinguish between parts of speech or to identify correct punctuation, capitalization and spelling. The reading logs in which Tony summarized, hypothesized, and reacted to books he read provided Ann with a more complete assessment of his comprehension than his answers to recall questions. A math notebook where Tony made predictions about, experimented with, and reflected on

numerical relationships furnished more information about Tony's mathematical understandings than did workbook pages. A video performance about the sun offered a more comprehensive look at Tony's problem solving strategies and his ability to use resources than a battery of standardized tests.

### Potential for Self-Assessment

Alternatives such as portfolios, performance tasks, and exhibitions potentially make assessment more than the single uni-directional process of the teacher looking at the student. Students on the opposite side of the one-way observation window see their own image reflected. Alternative assessments can potentially foster self-assessment and equip learners to monitor their own progress. Collaborating with Ann to define a research project and establish criteria for evaluation, Tony and his classmates had a better understanding of what was expected of them and what was necessary to achieve a standard or reach a goal. Reflecting on his own work, Tony was better able to recognize his strengths, identify areas for further growth, and develop a better understanding of his own learning.

In selecting items for his portfolio in fifth grade, Tony assessed his learning and defined what counted as evidence of his understanding. By describing the reasons he

included each piece, Tony solidified connections he made and reflected on the role of various activities in his developing understanding. Although his self-assessments often focused on his behavior rather than on what or how he learned, the self-assessments involved Tony in thinking about his own learning. Self-assessment encouraged Tony to look at changes in his work over time, set goals, and monitor his own progress. While Tony's self-assessments helped him understand and evaluate his work, they also provided Ann with valuable insights.

Through Tony's self-assessments Ann gained additional information about his perceptions, understandings, and achievements. The homework machine did not depict all that happened as Tony collaborated with Steve. Nor did the report on tigers reveal the interactions Tony had with the volunteer as they searched for information in the library. Tony's comments about his work uncovered problems and understandings which were otherwise invisible. On the back of a math assignment in late October 1993, Tony explained that he did not understand estimation. Tony's self-assessment provided additional information for Ann as she made instructional and curricular decisions. She provided an opportunity for Tony and three other students to use newspaper ads to solve real-life rounding and estimation problems. Working with Tony individually, Ann linked

estimation to his experiences, continually rewording problems to assess, support, and extend his learning. Assessment in Ann's classroom was an opportunity and responsibility she shared with Tony.

### No Guarantees

Using portfolios and performance tasks does not insure richer, more accurate assessments of students' abilities. Nor do alternative assessment practices guarantee a more equitable distribution of power and control. The theoretical bases for alternative assessments can be misunderstood, ignored, or actively undermined by teachers or education policymakers. Teachers incorporating portfolios or performance tasks into their instructional program may retain control of what is assessed, how it is assessed, and what counts as evidence of understanding.

Little is gained if portfolios are used only to hold papers or if rubrics used to assess performance tasks are just another way to rank students on a hierarchical scale. The value of assessment alternatives is severely limited if teachers provide little guidance for students evaluating their own work or if teachers ignore the insights offered by students' self-assessments. Although it revealed much about his instructional and curricular program, Tony's fourth grade portfolio told little about his literate learning, his

ability to work collaboratively with others, or his persistence and creativity in problem solving. The portfolio did not aid Tony in identifying his strengths, determining goals for future growth, or monitoring his progress.

Even if alternative assessment practices are successfully implemented at the classroom level, institutional policies on assessment may remain unchanged and seriously impact students' opportunities. Although his fifth grade portfolio offered examples of his literate ability and helped Tony monitor his own progress, he was also assessed by standardized tests. As a fifth grader Tony was required to take the district-mandated Survey of Basic Skills (SBS) and the state-mandated Literacy Passport Test (LPT). Mandated assessments allow students to be sorted and categorized based on arbitrary, impersonal, generalizable criteria. Test scores represent a standard by which decision makers measure the performance of students, teachers and administrators. Politically, standardized assessment provides a way to allocate opportunities or resources based on apparently objective qualifications or merit. Further, the results of standardized tests are used to make what can amount to life-changing decisions about students' placement (Madaus & Tan, 1993).

Despite Ann's assessment of Tony as an able learner,

the examples of literate learning presented in his fifth grade portfolio, and my document describing his literate abilities, Tony's educational opportunities may yet be defined by his standardized test scores. His scores on the LPT and SBS in fifth grade were recorded in his cumulative folder. The cumulative folder and the special education evaluations contained in his Confidential Category II file were forwarded at the end of the 1993-94 school year to the middle school Tony will attend next fall. How teachers and administrators at the middle school assess the evidence of Tony's understanding will play a part in determining his educational future. The label "borderline ability" and Tony's scores on standardized test may be used to place him in a lower track where little is expected. Rather than being described in terms of his strengths and potential, Tony may be defined by assessments that reduce his abilities to numbers and provide limited information about the social, cultural, or institutional settings in which the assessments occurred.

#### **The Rock Climb: Assessment in Support of Learning**

In a critical editorial published in Language Arts, David Dillion (1987) suggests that "evaluation remains one of the most characteristic traits of our educational system." Until alternative ways of assessing are developed,

Dillion (1987) contends:

any progress we make in language arts curriculum and instruction will remain severely hampered. The system - or at least this one aspect of it - will continue determining what we can and can't do. (p.271)

Gordon Pradl (1990) insists "one cannot approach assessment in a new way without also altering what passes for teaching and learning in a school setting" (p.3). Beginning at different points Dillion (1987) and Pradl (1990) reach the same conclusions: assessment and instruction are linked and meaningful change in one requires change in the other.

Building on Dillion (1987) and Pradl's (1990) ideas, I contend assessment and instruction must be intricately and inseparably interwoven in the on-going learning cycle. Tony's story helps delineate my point. Did Tony's identity as a non-reader and non-writer precede the fourth grade instructional program that defined his literacy in terms of decontextualized skills? Did Tony's borderline ability exist prior to the special education process that tested his skills and reduced his competencies to a set of scores? Some would argue the tasks presented in the fourth grade and tests administered as part of the special education evaluation documented what existed: Tony's inability to read and his borderline ability. My work with Tony and his



experiences in fifth grade suggest otherwise. I would argue that Tony's identity as a non-reader and non-writer with borderline ability was not something "out there" waiting to be found, labeled and fixed. Assessments of Tony as a non-reader, non-writer with borderline ability were produced in response to specific activities in distinctive situations and under particular circumstances.

Efforts then to develop technically more valid and reliable assessment practices to measure student ability or to develop innovative programs to "teach" skills are inadequate at best and ill-advised or wrong-headed at worst. Rather than re-visiting and revising assessment and instruction within the framework of traditional paradigms, we (teachers, students, parents, administrators, policymakers and others interested in education) must engage in conversations about assessment, instruction, and learning. We must imagine possibilities and explore how things might be different. We must re-define what we mean by assessment and instruction. We must re-conceptualize the relationship between the two and their role in the on-going process of learning.

The snapshots of learning provided by standardized tests and traditional classroom evaluation as well as the windows into literate ability offered by alternative practices cast assessment as a spectator event. Spectator

metaphors do not adequately address important aspects of assessment. Teachers and policymakers look at students. The metaphor of rock climbing extends my thinking and allows me to look at the relationship between assessment and learning differently. Like rock climbing, assessment in support of learning is a participatory event. It requires collaboration as teachers and students work together to support and advance learning. Meaningful assessment occurs from multiple perspectives, in multiple directions and requires shared responsibility .

#### Assessment from Multiple Perspectives

Enjoying the view from the top of Mount Hooker, rock climber Todd Skinner notes, "This is what it's all about. This is why I took up climbing." Skinner's view from the 2,000 foot summit is vastly different than one from the wildflower-strewn meadows of the surrounding Wyoming countryside (Dowling, 1994). Scaling steep mountain terrain allows climbers to see their world from multiple perspectives. Invisible from the base of the cliff, cracks wide enough to support an anchor are easily spotted by climbers as they inch their way to the summit. Possible hand-holds, undetectable when looking at the rock head-on, are exposed when the mountain face is studied from different angles and under varying light conditions. Towns obscured

by nearby hills become visible as climbers ascend. Different positions on the mountain afford climbers diverse challenges, unique views, and different perspectives.

To assist teacher in knowing their students sufficiently well to support their learning in meaningful ways requires assessments to be many, varied, and multi-perspectival. Assessing Tony's literate ability only from the perspective of his work in *Explode the Code* or his scores on standardized tests was inadequate. Ann observed and documented how Tony interacted, collaborated, and used resources to solve problems. She noticed how he performed for real audiences and for authentic purposes. Ann valued examples of Tony's literate behavior that occurred in non-classroom settings: journal entries written at home, notes to friends, a birthday wish list, or commands for a video game. Ann appreciated the insights offered by Tony's parents, school volunteers, and others who worked with him. Her attention focused on Tony, not on the skills being taught or the content being learned. Each perspective enhanced Ann's understanding of Tony's prior knowledge and experiences, his cultural and institutional context, and his potential for growth. For Ann, assessment was not a way of measuring something Tony had mastered, but a way of imagining what he might be able to accomplish.

### Multi-directional Assessment

Poised on the 2,400 foot face of Half Dome in California's Yosemite National Park (Dowling, 1994), rock climber Nancy Feagin's assessment of the situation proceeds in multiple directions. Leading a 150-foot stage of the sixty-five day climb, Feagin thinks about herself, her position on the mountain face, the route she plans to take, and the position of other climbers on the assault team. Other climbers on the team are cognizant of their positions in relation to Feagin, each other, and the face of the cliff. Every member of the team is keenly aware of the surrounding environment. Characteristics of the rock and the topography of the mountain determine the techniques and tools used for climbing and securing safety lines. Neglecting to notice impending storms, changes in temperature, and shifts in the speed or direction of the wind can be disastrous. Looking at one aspect of the climb is not enough. Successful ascents require assessments to be multi-directional.

Assessment in support of learning must be multi-directional also. In addition to looking at the student, teachers must continually examine their own beliefs, values and expectations. Teachers must ask themselves how their beliefs, values and expectations are reflected in their instructional program and interactions with students. They

must assess how their beliefs, values and expectations define and maintain a nurturing learning environment. It is not enough, Lowe and Bintz (1992) posit, "to simply develop new and different methods of assessment" (p.16). They state:

It is not method per se that enables teachers to assess student growth. It is their understanding of and reflection on the theoretical assumptions about knowledge, learning, literacy, teaching and curriculum that underlie classroom practice. (p.16)

Teachers must possess what Peter Johnston (1992) calls a "critical reflectiveness" or an "intelligent unrest" as they assess themselves as well as students.

Grounded in Johnston's notion of "critical reflectiveness" and "intelligent unrest," assessment becomes a form of inquiry in which teachers examine and question their own practice. The focus shifts from identifying effective teaching strategies or learners' "problems" to observing a student and exploring the strategies best suited for that learner in a specific situation. If *Explode the Code* exercises did not appear to support Tony's development as a reader and writer, was it the fault of the student or the nature of the instructional strategy? Extending the concept of inquiry, assessment becomes teachers' on-going

study of: 1) their own beliefs, values and expectations; 2) how those beliefs, values and expectations are reflected in their curricular, instructional and assessment practices as well as their classroom interactions; 3) students' strengths, interests, needs, and interactions; and, 4) the mesh between their instructional practices and students' needs in an effort to support learning.

Let me advance the idea of multi-directionality further, beyond teachers and students looking at themselves. Assessment-as-inquiry could provide opportunities for students to look at teaching and ask: Is this instructional program or teaching environment meeting my needs as a learner? How does the instructional program in the classroom define my success or failure? Pressing the notion one step further, teachers and students could critically examine the social and institutional contexts in which assessments occur and ask important questions: How do imposed testing mandates influence the instructional program and the assessment of students? Who controls assessment in the classroom? in the school? in the district? What can be done to affect change if assessment practices define students in ways that are inaccurate, incomplete, or unfair?

Expanding the parameters of evaluation to be multi-directional rather than uni-directional requires students and teachers to share responsibility for and control of the

assessment process. As participants in the assessment process students and teachers can begin to ask: What will be assessed? How will it be assessed? and, What counts as evidence of competence? Within a framework of multi-directional assessment, teachers and students could question institutional decisions and initiate policy or procedural changes. Ultimately making the focus of assessment multi-directional would permit students and teachers to have control over assessment rather than allowing assessment to control them.

#### Context for Growth: Sharing Responsibility

On a 150-foot section of the assault on Yosemite's Half Dome, Nancy Feagin challenged the team to take calculated risks and climb to new heights. As leader, Feagin's defined the route, anticipated problems, and warned other climbers of potential obstacles. Although Feagin assumed a leadership role, every climber was as equally responsible for the safety of the team and success of the climb. In an environment of mutual respect, climbers on the team were neither independent nor dependent, but inter-dependent.

Inter-dependent as well, teachers and students must share responsibility for assessment and learning. They must jointly create a space in which optimal learning can occur. Although Ann established parameters for an activity or over-

arching goals for a unit, she recognized students' expertise, connected with students' interests, and drew on students' experiences. Interested in Tony's Kungfu lessons, Ann related his experiences to her self-defense classes and asked him to teach her some moves. Throughout the year Tony was given the opportunity and responsibility for selecting his own spelling words, deciding what books he wanted to read, and choosing the topics for his writing. Ann was willing to relinquish control and allow Tony to take the lead. As a result, Tony was willing to risk investing in his own learning.

Sharing responsibility is not easy when the situation challenges teachers' beliefs or infringes on valued elements of their instructional program. The difficulty Ann had reconciling her commitment to shared responsibility and her beliefs about the importance of writing were illustrated in her interactions with Mike, another student in her class. Mike wanted to spend less time writing and more time reading about science or doing science experiments. Initially Ann resisted. "Writing is something we emphasize," she explained to me, "and I just can't let him do science all the time."

Over the next several weeks Ann and the student negotiated a compromise. Ann agreed to allow Mike time each week to prepare and present a science experiment to the rest



of the class. She stressed the importance of writing as a way for scientists to communicate and encouraged Mike to record his findings. Ann also gave Mike the freedom to relate everything he was asked to do to science. "For instance," she explained, "if I ask you to write a mystery you can write about how you used your knowledge of chemistry to solve the crime. If I ask you to write a poem, write about an animal or a science topic you find interesting." By negotiating and sharing responsibility with the student Ann established a context for growth.

Sharing responsibility had benefits beyond just getting Mike to write. By negotiating a compromising covenant with Mike, Ann establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect. The confidence she placed in Mike reinforced the belief he had in his own ability. At the end of the year Mike applied for the district's science and technology magnet school. Perhaps more importantly, Mike received one of the state's Young Author's Awards for a poem he submitted.

Once again Johnston's (1992) concepts of "critical reflectiveness" and "intellectual unrest" are relevant. Teachers must ask critical questions: Do I value sharing responsibility for assessment and learning with my students? Is my valuing of shared responsibility reflected in my instructional and curricular practices? How can I create an

environment in which students and I take the risk and accept the challenge of collaboratively determining the purposes, forms and interpretations of assessment?

Like rock climbing, sharing responsibility and control of the learning environment involves risks. Teachers and students must risk seeing themselves as learners. Both must be willing to consider divergent answers or new ways to approach a problem. Both must be willing to be vulnerable and to say: "I don't know;" "You might be right;" "I don't agree;" "What do you think?" or "Let's find out together." As Maxine Greene (1988) suggests,

Teachers, like their students, have to learn to love the questions, as they come to realize that there can be no final agreements or answers, no final commensurability. As we have been talking about stories that open perspectives on communities grounded in trust, flowering by means of dialogue, kept alive in open spaces where freedom can find a place. (p.134)

Taking the risk to invest in a collaborative relationship and to jointly create a space in which learning can occur requires trust. Teachers must trust themselves to make decisions based on their observations, experiences, and instincts. They must trust students' desire to learn, willingness to assume responsibility, and ability to

construct meaning. Students must trust their own capacity to analyze new information, to draw on previous experiences and prior knowledge, and to transform the knowledge into a form they can understand and use. Students must also trust teachers to value learners' ideas and opinions. In a trustful environment, teachers and students may jointly define assessment in support of learning.

#### Climbing Together:Assisting Performance, Supporting Learning

Novice rock climber Todd Skinner met climbing expert, Paul Piana at the University of Wyoming. "Todd was keen, but as a climber, pathetic," Piana recalls. For a time Todd relied heavily on Piana's expertise, judgment, and guidance. Todd shied away from taking the lead and was content to belay, or anchor a safety rope from below. With support, encouragement, and practice, Piana notes, "Todd just got better and better." In the seventeen years since the two met, each has challenged himself, the other, and the limits of human ability as they scaled the sheerest cliffs on the North American continent (Dowling, 1994).

The space between the climbing Todd Skinner was capable of doing on his own and what he could do with the support and guidance of Piana represents Todd's zone of proximal development. To support Todd's learning and provide opportunities for him to improve, the climbers assessed what

Todd could do independently. Jointly they determined the limits of what Todd could do with assistance and what kind of assistance he needed. Together they constructed a opportunities in which learning could occur. Continuously the pair re-assessed what Todd could do independently and the upper limits of what he could do with support. Each assessment re-defined Todd's instructional needs, the nature of useful practice, and the kinds of assistance or guidance that would be most helpful. The on-going assessments of Todd's zone of proximal development supported his learning.

In the context of the rock climbing metaphor and Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, the ideas of assessment as assisted performance and assessment in support of learning become clearer. It is not enough to assess what students can do independently. It is essential to explore what they can do as they collaborate with the teacher or their peers. As meaning is constructed in joint problem solving situations, teachers discover students' interests, abilities, and the nature of their understanding. Based on these insights teachers cooperate with students to construct tasks and create environments that offer enticing and challenging learning opportunities. Also, based on these insights, teachers and students jointly define the amount and nature of the assistance necessary to advance the student's learning. Together, teachers and students

construct a zone where meaningful, purposeful learning can occur.

### **Contextualizing Assessments of Literate Learning**

When instruction is broken down into a linear, hierarchical progression of discrete facts and skills, assessments measure students' ability to recall the facts or demonstrate mastery of the skills. Difficulty "learning" the material taught may be interpreted by the teacher as failure. Instructional practices in Tony's fourth grade class focused on skills and the transmission of knowledge. In that context Tony was defined as unable to read or write. In contrast, Tony's fifth grade instructional program was based on the teacher's view of literacy as socially constructed and her belief that students make meaning as they work with others in supportive environments. In the fifth grade class Tony was assessed as a reader and writer.

The discrepant assessments of Tony's literate learning could not be understood without examining the sociocultural settings in which the assessments were produced. Tony's story made visible the invisible social processes of classroom life and the education policies in which assessments of his literate abilities and learning were embedded. Through Tony's story I addressed how assessments of students' literate abilities and learning are

constructed. I examined the relationship between curricular and instructional practices and assessments of students' literate learning.

Everyday, assessments of students' literate abilities and learning define their access to resources and opportunities to participate in communities of literate practice. Assessments have significant consequences for students' education biographies. If the education community is unwilling to examine the context in which assessments are produced, labels such as "he can't read or write" might well become self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead, as a community of individuals interested in education we must be willing to: critically examine our practice; establish co-participatory, multi-directional assessment practices that create nurturing spaces for learning; and, acknowledge multiple perspectives. We must view assessment as a beginning, rather than an end. As such, assessments will assist performance and support learning. Through Tony's story it becomes clear that assessments of students' literate learning must be examined in the sociocultural context in which the assessments are produced.

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## APPENDIX A

### RESEARCH BIOGRAPHY

For me, research has always been more a way of seeing than a way of proving.

Thomas Newkirk, *More Than Stories*

Goals too clearly defined can become blinkers.

Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

When I began my research, friends and family unfamiliar with ethnography would ask about my hypothesis and how I planned to extrapolate or generalize my findings to a broader population. Usually I would mumble something about studying assessment in a school in Railtown and hope they would drop the subject. It was disconcerting to be "in the field" and not be able to explain concisely what I was doing or what results I expected. I generated ideas, analyzed reams of data and made connections, but the focus and structure of a final document eluded me. Even things that appeared straightforward and clear-cut in the beginning became muddled and confusing as the research progressed. Knowing my plight was similar to others involved in ethnographic research offered little solace.

Tracing threads of my research process as they wove around people, knotted in and out of conversations, and twisted through events was a complicated task. Everything seemed interwoven, interrelated and interactive. Yet

constructing an ethnography of the ethnography (Snajek, 1990), a story that would make my research process visible, was crucial. As Stephen Ball (1990) suggests:

The choices, omissions, problems, and successes of the fieldwork will shape the process of the research in particular ways.... Indeed, what counts ..., what is seen and unnoticed, what is and is not recorded, will depend on the interests, questions, and relationships that are brought to bear in a particular scene. (p. 169)

To adequately describe the complexities on paper proved difficult. Print reduced, fragmented, and suggested a linear progression. Ball (1990) postulates that the story ... belies the means employed to collect [the research data]. The possibilities of reflexivity available to the author are denied to the reader. The organic link between ... collection and ... analysis, and between theory and method, is broken. (pp. 169, 170)

As I untangled and traced the threads of my research process I constructed a personally meaningful story that captured the fluid, dynamic nature of my research.

### A Setting for Collaborative Research

Thurber Intermediate School is a culturally diverse intermediate school (grades 3 - 5) in Railtown, a mid-sized

city in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The student population of approximately 180 is about 60% European-American and 40% African-American. About 55% of the students qualify for the Federal Free Lunch Program and another 5-10% for reduced lunch. A small percentage (less than 5%) are students for whom English is a second language. There are seven self-contained classes: three third grade, two fourth grade, and two fifth. The Chapter One program has until this year, been a pull-out program involving children in all three grades. Currently the Chapter One teacher and aide are attempting to work with eligible students in the regular classrooms. Students identified as learning disabled have been included in regular classrooms for three years and the special education teachers and aides work collaboratively with classroom teachers to meet students' needs. This year some of the students labeled emotionally disturbed and educable mentally handicapped are also being integrated into regular classrooms.

Written by the faculty and administration, Thurber's goals provide the basis for site-based decisions. The goals include: 1) the acceptance of all students, 2) the recognition that students learn in uniquely individual ways, 3) the implementation of discipline based on positive models, 4) the incorporation of a "whole language" philosophy, and 5) the importance of staff commitment to the

school's vision (A copy of Thurber's goals is included in Appendix B). In an effort to support the school's mission and vision the principal and faculty have participated as a group in week-long professional development programs on global education and outcomes-based education.

Individually, the principal and teachers have attended staff development workshops and conferences on multi-aged grouping, whole language, school change, and alternative assessment. Thurber is moving toward a more integrated "whole language" curriculum and trying to define what that means in concrete terms. They have initiated cooperative/collaborative learning, literature-based and thematic instruction, and portfolios. Eliminating letter grades on report cards, they have substituted the letters M (mastery), T (trying), and N (needs help) and narratives as alternative ways to communicate students' progress to parents

As principal of Thurber Intermediate School, Aaron Jones was interested in providing opportunities for professional growth for teachers and innovative educational programs for students. Collaborative research, he believed, could provide opportunities for the faculty to stretch and for the university to be involved with a school that is trying new things. During the summer of 1992 Aaron contacted Judy Self (then with the Virginia Department of



Education) and Dr. Josiah Tlou from the College of Education's Division of Curriculum and Instruction at Virginia Tech to discuss the possibility of collaborative research. Dr. Tlou introduced Aaron to Dr. Jan Nesor, an educational anthropologist also in the Division of Curriculum and Instruction. Conversations with Aaron and Jan's ongoing research interest in language and learning within the school and in the larger community, precipitated a proposal for collaborative research between Virginia Tech and Thurber Intermediate School. As a doctoral student I was invited to participate in the collaborative project.

Committed to what Michelle Fine (1992) calls "participatory activist research," Jan and I hoped to follow lines of inquiry initiated by the teachers and to involve them in a collaborative endeavor. Such research assumes:

that knowledge is best gathered in the midst of social change projects -- that the partial perspectives of participants and observers can be collected by researchers in "power sensitive conversations"

(Haraway, 1988). This work is at once disruptive, transformative, and reflective; about understanding about action; not about freezing the scene but always about change (Gitlin, Siegel, and Boru, 1989). (Fine, 1992)

Through collaborative inquiry, researchers, teachers, and

administrators would become more aware of the multiple positions and perspectives involved in schooling. A collaborative research project would provide opportunities to engage in a kind of continuous collective discussion on substantive issues of what the school is and should be.

Where to begin conversations about collaborative research proved to be the first challenge. Though it sounded relatively simple, even drafting an initial memo posed problems. The first draft was dense, filled with academic language, references, and quotes. Without revisions it would reinforce teachers' perceptions that the university community was too theoretical and out of touch with practice and the day-to-day world of schools. After much negotiating and rewriting Jan and I had a six page memo that provided a general description of collaborative research and suggested broad topics of possible interest.

First Impressions. Our first meeting with the faculty of Thurber was scheduled for September 23, 1992. After talking briefly with Aaron as he coordinated students dismissal and bus departure, Jan and I proceeded to the building's third-floor library. An announcement blared over the intercom, reminding teachers to bring the proposal from Virginia Tech to the faculty meeting. Nervously I wandered around the library for several minutes before sitting down

to record my observations and feelings. I wrote:

How much do I need to write down? Should my notes describe the room in detail so I'll be able to recreate the scene for readers? What about my own thoughts and feelings? Are they important? I can't help wondering how they'll react to the ideas in the proposal and speculating about how I would react in their shoes. What if they aren't interested in collaboration...?

Teachers began to arrive just before 3:30. A teacher in her mid-thirties put her things on a table to the left at the far end of the library. Another teacher sat down at a table in the far right corner. The librarian and the schools' two teachers sat at the table nearest me. A group of five teachers clustered at a table in the center. Their conversation focused on what they did in class as they shared information and ideas.

Judith: We did newscasts and book commercials to go along with our novel.

Ann: That's an interesting idea.

Patty: I'll take it and do this with it.

Anita: May I use the microphone tomorrow?

Judith: Oh, you're going to use a real microphone. We used a toilet paper roll covered with paper.

Only one teacher said hello to Jan and me. The rest

were absorbed in conversation and did not acknowledge our presence. The awkwardness and strangeness of a familiar situation amazed me. As a teacher I arrived at faculty meetings anxious to talk to colleagues, exhausted from a day in the classroom, and usually dreading the litany of announcements, information, and questions. At Thurber I was not a teacher. I was outside the circle of friendly chatter and laughter. The situation felt uncomfortable and more than a little disconcerting.

At 3:35 Aaron arrived, clapped his hands to get the teachers' attention and turned the meeting over to Jan. Jan introduced himself and me, and then outlined our interest in collaborative research. "A collaborative project," he explained, "will not necessarily require more of your time. It might, however, mean using your time differently. You're in control. You may back off or drop out at any time." Most everyone appeared actively engaged as they listened, asked questions, and responded to the memo. Their questions and comments reflected their thoughts:

"This is not a short term project," a teacher sitting near me observed. "This is a long term thing."

"If we are going to take whole language seriously and be a whole language school this is exactly what has to happen: the engagement with the community, the interaction with parents."

"I am excited about the possibility of this leading to more parental involvement and interaction," the teacher sitting at a table in the far right corner added.

"I'm pumped about the idea of a community memory book.

"I'm particularly interested in looking at the way teachers are evaluated," Aaron stated. "[Evaluations] helping teachers reflect on what they've done, rather than the existing top down rating procedure."

Though interested, the teachers were skeptical of our intent and the commitment such a collaborative endeavor would require. They asked what we were actually going to do, what we would do with the findings, and what they would gain by being involved. They asked for clarification and continued to reframe the questions until they were relatively satisfied with where things were going. They negotiated with us to define the initial parameters, which is what we hoped they would do.

One of the teachers had the courage to identify collaborative research as a *trust* issue. It did seem to be about trust. Rather than us *doing research* on them, it was them getting to know us and us getting to know them and something emerging out of the relationship that neither might have envisioned independently. Through the conversation in September, Jan and I obtained permission to "hang out," or visit on a regular basis, sit in on classes

and attend faculty meetings. The nature and extent of continued involvement would be determined after we had spent several weeks in the school.

"Hanging Out" During October and November I spent one day a week at Thurber. My goal was to establish a rapport with students, teachers and staff as well as become familiar with the routines and personality of the school. I had identified assessment as an overarching research interest and the time spent in classrooms or conversations helped me realize the complexity and multilayered nature of the topic. The weeks also provided an opportunity for me to experiment and problematize my role as a researcher.

*October 7* - My first day "hanging out" was spent in Kim Preston's fifth grade classroom on the third floor of the building. Desks were arranged in clusters of 4-6 with little room for walking in between. The size of students and desks as well as the number (29) made the room feel cramped and congested.

10:50        Kim: You need a pencil. Quiz time. M, you will need to give me five full minutes. I'm starting the clock over. J, you will find yourself in the same situation if you don't turn around and get your act together. The directions say: circle,

underline, or draw a line between. I'll hand out the sheets face down. Then we'll turn them over and go over the directions. Does everyone have one? [At this point there was a loud uproar and general chaos.]

Kim: Wait a minute here. What's going on here? The directions say: circle the simple subject; draw a line between the subject and the verb; underline the verb. Write your name on the back. [Kim went over to her desk to work while students took the quiz.]

11:00 Kim collected the tests and called on Andy to share chopsticks and a book he brought from home about Korea.

11:10 Kim: This is a filmstrip about the homes of famous men of the Revolution who lived in Virginia. [Kim started the filmstrip and came back to talk to me. She stopped the filmstrip three or four times to ask students to identify an individual or if a student commented about a particular home. The rest of the time she focused on apologizing to me for her students' behavior.]

As I fleshed out my fieldnotes I caught myself critiquing the quiz, its decontextualized nature, its focus on isolated skills and its usefulness in the real world of

reading and writing. I struggled to find a balance in the research process between asking critical questions and being critical. My presence seemed to make Kim nervous. At times I wanted to fade into the woodwork so she would not see me, would not feel threatened and would not worry.

*October 21* - Diane Lovern's third grade class did not seem as crowded as the fifth grade room. Instead of desks students sat at wooden tables with smooth black tops. They reminded me of lab tables only smaller in size. The tables are not adjustable but they seem to be an appropriate height. Chairs are metal with molded plastic seats.

9:30 Diane: Take out your spelling homework so we can check it. [While the students were getting their homework Diane wrote on the board:]

a-c-e      i-c-e      o-c-e      u-c-e

Diane: We're going to come to the board and put the spelling word under the correct spelling pattern. Nicki, would you go up and write one of the words under the correct spelling pattern. We're working on long vowel sounds.

9:35 Diane: [to David] You didn't put them in the groups under the correct spelling pattern. You wrote them in one long list.

Diane: [to Michael] That word (praise) does have a



long a but it has a different spelling pattern. We have to add it to the list but in a different group. [Michael added a new column "a-silent vowel-consonant and then put praise in that column.]

9:40 - The work with the spelling words continued for the entire list of words. A woman I didn't know brought a tall African American girl wearing black bib overalls with plaid flannel patches on the bib and pocket into the classroom. Diane called the girl Tamera. "Is Tamera mine all day?" Diane asked. "Yes," the woman replied, "unless there's a problem." [Diane came back to tell me Tamera is identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) and is being mainstreamed into her class. Diane described Tamera as "a sweet girl who is not a problem."

The spelling lesson reminded me how difficult it was to talk about issues and raise questions without appearing to blast the teacher. Assessing students' spelling ability has traditionally been separate from reading and writing (i.e. calling out 20 words for students to spell correctly on the Friday test). Traditional spelling tests do not assess what we want to know about students' spelling ability (i.e. their

ability to spell correctly so they can communicate in writing).

October 28 - Students in Anita Earp's fourth grade were finishing several activities in preparation for Grandparents Day tomorrow. They had been reading The Prince and the Pauper and were editing stories about a haunted castle. On the board were the results of a brainstorming session they'd had the day before to generate suggestions for characters, setting, and plot.

9:35 Anita: [to Jeff] I'm glad you are reading The Prince and the Pauper but you have not read even one book for the pizza contest. I appreciate that you want to finish the book we are reading in class but you are supposed to be reading for the book contest. [Jeff puts The Prince and the Pauper away and gets out another book. He sat down at his desk and starts to look at the book.

9:40 Anita: [to Jeff] I think this might be too hard and too long for the contest. The first month why don't you choose a book that might be a little easier and not quite so long?

Anita: [to Natalie] You're working on a book report I hope. You're never going to get a pizza if you don't do a book report. If you haven't

read the book, you can't do the book report. You have to read the book. [Natalie sighs, sits down, and gets out a book to read.]

Spending time in classrooms reminded me that assessments were not always in the form of a quiz or test. Everyday, students' strengths and abilities were assessed and communicated in explicit and implicit terms. Jeff's reading ability was assessed based on the number and kinds of books Anita thought appropriate. The spelling ability of students in Diane's class was evaluated based on the results of Friday spelling tests. Kim assessed her students' command of English on their ability circle or underline nouns and verbs correctly. Students' abilities, strengths and unfortunately, weaknesses are seen through teachers' constructed assessments. The challenge is to find ways to talk about how we as teachers construct assessments of students and the consequences of those assessments in the lives of children. It is a lot easier for me to look critically at Anita's practice than it ever was at my own practice. How do those of us involved in education at all levels create environments where critical reflection on our own practice is not only valued but expected?

*November 4* - I spent the half hour before school talking with principal Aaron Jones about the research proposal. Jan

and I have spent several weeks "hanging out" and hope to talk about the specifics and secure a firm commitment from teachers by mid-December. Aaron suggested we give the teachers a revised copy of the proposal one week, then come to the faculty meeting the next week to answer questions, gauge the teachers' interest and willingness to participate, and negotiate a commitment.

8:40 Aaron shared an interesting story about grades:

Thurber's report card is different from any other school in Railtown. They do not give letter grades. Instead they identify behaviors and skills as mastered (M), trying (T), or needs improvement (N). Recently a parent complained about her children's marks. The fifth grade child had all M's but one. The fourth grade child had all M's but two. According to Aaron the mother "hit the ceiling." She does not like the new reporting instrument and certainly does not understand why her children would not get all M's. There had been no indication the students were "having trouble" since a mid-9 weeks report had not been sent home. "We had to take her complaints seriously," Aaron commented. "She's the type of person who would call friends and stir up negative attitudes toward our report card. She's also capable of calling someone at the school board office and lodging a formal

complaint." Aaron believes most students have a different attitude toward the progress reports because they don't get letter grades. "They're less uptight and worried about grades," he speculated, "because they know they are not going to get blasted at home every nine weeks because of their grades."

12:40 - One of the students Aaron mentioned this morning is in Judith Samuelson's fourth grade. At lunch Judith said she and the fifth grade teacher were just going to put M's over the T's. "At least that way it will be apparent the mark was changed."

My journal entry following my conversation with Aaron and Judith summarized how I was thinking about assessment and constructing the parameters of my research focus. I wrote:

The whole issue of "grades" is a difficult aspect of assessment. I wonder what the word mastery means to teachers, to students, and to parents? Each, I believe, would have a different definition. The letters M, T, and N seemed to translate into A, B, C for the parent who complained. Despite good intentions, describing progress or achievement in terms of mastery, trying, and needs improvement can set up another way to hierarchically rank and sort students. Students earning M's are "doing better" than students

earning T's. Students earning N's are "not as capable" or "not working as hard." A student who "needs help" must not be "trying." The conversation with Aaron reminded me how broad the topic of assessment really is. Too often it's dismissed as simply either teacher-made or standardized tests. It more complex than that. Teachers assess students at every turn - their behavior, their attitudes, their background and experiences, their knowledge of content, what they say and even how they say it. Those assessments have significant consequences for students.

On December 11, Jan and I presented four potential ideas for collaborative research to the faculty at Thurber: reinventing "teaching," alternative assessment, community and school connections, and institutional arrangements. We assured everyone that commitments of time and energy were negotiable by identifying several levels of engagement. We asked for input regarding their interest in and willingness to engage with us in collaborative work on particular topics. Several teachers indicated they would like to focus on assessment.

### Self-as-Researcher

Assuming the role of researcher was uncomfortable, particularly during those first few weeks at Thurber.

Although I had been out of the classroom for almost two years, I still thought of myself as a teacher. Initially, when I observed in a class I caught myself wondering how I would have handled a situation or reacted to a child.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that conducting a study in a familiar setting or with people you know can be confusing.

They state:

Becoming a researcher means more than learning specific skills and procedures. It involves changing your way of thinking about yourself and your relations with others. It involves feeling comfortable with the role of "researcher." (p. 61)

In some ways my teacher-self was a great asset. It helped me try to put myself in the teacher's place and understand events and interactions from her perspective. My teacher-self was comfortable engaging in relaxed lunch time chatter as well as conversations about curriculum. My teacher-self was less comfortable taking fieldnotes and conducting interviews. In some ways my teacher-self was also my greatest weakness. It required that I consciously redefine my role and deliberately question how my experiences influenced what I saw, who I talked to, and what I chose to record.

## Why Assessment?

Michelle Fine (1992) suggests researchers are "human inventors of some questions and repressors of others" (p.208) and shapers of the very contexts studied. My interest in assessment stems directly from my experiences as a teacher and a parent. In both roles I have questioned what has been assessed, how it has been assessed and what has been done with the results. I have questioned the depth and breath of information gleaned from multiple-choice, true/false, or short answer assessments. Observations recorded as students completed individual tasks or worked in groups informed my classroom instruction on a daily basis. Noting when my students or my daughters needed help, what kind of help they needed, and how much help was required provided insights into their understanding and guided my decisions as to how I might best support their learning. Though my assessments were an integral part of my instruction they were not valued. What counted were not my observations and insights, but the textbook tests required in reading and math, the minimum competency tests mandated by the state, and the achievement tests (CTBS) administered each spring. I had little, if any, control over the assessments that counted for my students or my daughters and felt powerless to affect change.

When I came back to teaching in 1982, I realized the



enormity of the changes occurring in the five years I had stayed home while the girls were little. Reading assessment had become synonymous with a series of computer-scored, textbook tests on isolated skills ranging from the identification of vowel sounds to using guide words in the dictionary. Math tests were also written by textbook publishers and computer-scored, reducing math assessment to a series of darkened bubbles on a multiple-choice test. If students did not achieve 80% mastery on the test, teachers were required to reteach and/or remediate. In most cases this meant giving the student more worksheets formatted exactly like the test and covering the same decontextualized skills. If, after remediating and retesting three times, the student still did not achieve 80% mastery the teacher was "off the hook" and could justifiably move on to something else. It is not difficult to imagine what happened. Those students who had a wealth of experiences upon which to draw, who grasped concepts quickly, or who could play the testing game demonstrated mastery immediately. Those who had more difficulty remained mired in the teach, test, reteach, test cycle until the teacher could document repeated, though unsuccessful, effort. After teaching and reteaching, students were allowed to move on with little regard for what they actually understood and were able to accomplish.

Skills introduced in the reading and math program were correlated with the Basic Skills Objectives outlined in the Defined Minimum Program and the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP). A minimum competency test, BSAP, was administered in the spring to determine where individual students, schools, and districts stood in relation to the Defined Minimum Program. Results of the test were reported to teachers and parents in terms of competencies and deficiencies. Teachers were required to identify students' deficiencies from the previous year, document efforts to address the deficiency, and retest for mastery. All of the "proof" was stored in the student's BSAP folder, passed on from year to year, and subject to audit, without advance notice, by the principal, district administrators, or state personnel<sup>1</sup>.

The environment created in the elementary school where I taught illustrates the consequences of standardized testing in terms of learning and the effects on students and teachers. In the fall teachers would be given the item analysis based on the previous year's test. We were to identify areas where our students consistently did poorly.

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<sup>1</sup> This was under the auspices of South Carolina's Education Improvement Act passed in the early 1980's. Though I'm sure the program's intent was not to deskill teachers and decontextualize student learning that was essentially what happened. The BSAP folder like the cumulative record became one more inscription representing and reducing the student. Each fall students were sorted based on reading and math scores on the computerized textbook tests, BSAP, and CTBS. Once sorted they were assigned so each class had a high, middle and low ability group. The inscriptions had become the student. Teachers' observations or insights based on other assessments were not part of the equation.

"If only we had taught the skills more thoroughly and assigned more practice our students' scores in that area would have been better." We were shown other teachers' item analysis print-outs and comparisons were made. If BA's students did better than MH's in math the principal suggested MH talk to BA. "Find out what she's doing you're not. Find out how she covers the material." The implication was clear. If students were not performing as well as anticipated on the test you had not done your job as teacher.

The effects of this high-stakes environment were devastating. Teachers became competitive. BA wanted her test scores to stay on top so instead of collaborating she isolated herself and refused to share. Jealous and insecure in her own ability, MH resented the praise heaped on BA. Teachers became fearful. If scores were not "good" the teacher's effectiveness would be questioned by parents and administrators and performance in the classroom would be more closely monitored. Test scores of the students in CD's fourth grade class were lower than expected. Her teaching methods judged ineffective and inadequate, CD was openly criticized by administrators. Repeatedly CD was assigned students labeled as "low-ability," so she would not "mess-up" the test scores of the high-ability students. Little attention was given to CD's efforts to implement hands-on

science and integrate curriculum; such things were not measured by the test.

This high-stakes environment inevitably led to "teaching the test." Everyone knew what was on the test and how it was presented. We had used the same form of the test for years. Our curriculum was driven by those skills tested. Topics not covered by the test were given only cursory attention at best and were often ignored completely. BA's goal, for example, was to finish the 5th grade math book in late January or early February so she could spend at least a month reviewing for CTBS. Coverage became more important than understanding or ability to apply. Creativity and critical problem solving were not encouraged in many classrooms because such abilities did not fit into the narrow scope of textbook computer-scored reading and math tests, minimum competency tests, or norm-referenced, standardized achievement tests.

Though security during the tests was tight, we not only suspected cheating but knew of instances where teachers and administrators bent the rules. SD would walk around the room looking at students' answers. If she saw an error she would say, "You might want to check #7." She did not tell them the correct answer, just warned them their answer was wrong. Tests of less able students were often "invalidated" by teachers or administrators so the scores would not be

included in the school or classroom profile. Answer sheets were meticulously checked for stray marks and incomplete coding. More than once rumors circulated that an incomplete answer sheet had returned to the classroom with every item bubbled.

Preparation for the test focused on both cognitive and affective domains. Starting in January we were required to use Scoring High, a test preparation program, three times every week for at least an hour. In addition to Scoring High many teachers would change their own tests to more closely resemble CTBS in content and format. One year the assistant principal recruited students to act in a series of skits showing how to relieve test-taking anxiety, reminding students to eat and sleep well before the test, and challenging them to do their best. The year the entire school was given the words to several test taking raps. The one forever emblazoned in my memory was

"Bust the test, bust the test, baby.

You can do it, you can bust the test!"

Blasting from the intercom each day before school in the two weeks prior to the CTBS test, this and several other raps described what students could do to prepare for the test.

During test week smiley faces and messages to "Do Your Best!" appeared on every blackboard. Desks were moved away from each other and positioned at odd angles to prevent even

a momentary glance at another student's answer sheet. Every student was given a new #2 pencil that said "Bust the Test" or "You're #1." Parents were encouraged to send in high-energy snacks for children to eat during the break between tests. Signs warning "Testing: Do Not Disturb" were taped to the door. Tense children sat nervously in their desks as overly anxious teachers gave last minute reminders and directions. The messages were not even subtle. No one doubted the importance of the tests and their results.

Once all testing was over there was a nearly audible collective sigh of relief from teachers and a noticeable difference in instruction. Teachers were more willing to experiment, to take risks, and to implement less traditional instructional methods such as cooperative learning groups and peer tutoring. The number of worksheets students were expected to complete diminished and the opportunities to think creatively and critically increased as pressure was temporarily reduced. Sometimes those weeks after CTBS were the only time all year when I felt any "real" learning took place.

Tension would begin to mount again in late May in anticipation. "Have the scores come in yet?" was the question most frequently asked in meetings or the teachers' lounge. When scores finally arrived news traveled quickly and by the end of the day every teacher would have dropped

by the office to look at scores. "How did my class look?" "How did Katie do?" "Did their scores go up?" "How many did I have in the bottom quartile?" Who we were as teachers and who the students were as learners was defined by scale scores, grade-level equivalencies, and national percentiles on computer generated spreadsheets.

In a frenzy of activity during the next few weeks, scores would analyzed, grouped, and manipulated in dozens of ways. Each child's new scores would be compared to those of the previous year, with gains and losses noted. Scores were compiled to determine where classes had improved and where there had been difficulty. The final day of school each grade level was assembled separately in the commons area as the principal announced a recognition and reward system based on standardized test scores. Within each class the student receiving the highest scale score in each section of the test would earn a certificate. So on the final day of school we celebrated what was learned based on standardized, norm-referenced test scores. Individual students were called to the front, presented a certificate, and allowed to stand before their peers as symbols of test taking success.

So far this has sounded rather like a critique of the system, as if I were an uninvolved by-stander. Unfortunately that was not the case. I was part of the system and I played the game. I received incentive money

several times between 1984 and 1989 because my students scored well on CTBS. I knew exactly which students had "maxed-out" by being in the 99th percentile on previous tests. Maintaining their high scores was essential. I also knew which students were in the bottom two quartiles and had the greatest potential for improvement. I knew, in a general sense, what was on the test and specifically covered the things I thought students might not know. Yes, I usually tried to do all this in a creative way and to incorporate the skills into the integrated thematic units I was already implementing. I tried to balance what I did to prepare for the required textbook reading and math tests, minimum competency testing, and achievement tests with the day-to-day activities through which I assessed my students' understanding and determined how I could best enhance their learning. But that was not always possible, at least not in an authentic way. So I compromised and bowed to the pressure of the system because the alternative meant professional chastisement and criticism of my teaching ability.

Refusing to share, criticizing colleagues, teaching the test and cheating are unflattering ways to describe teachers. Certainly not characteristics of individuals I would want working with my children. But such generalizations and assumptions misrepresent and



oversimplify the situation. Most of my colleagues were good people and competent, often exciting, teachers. But the testing environment in this particular school threatened us and brought out the worst in each of us. It was a lose-lose situation. Through tests we were held accountable. Our students' scores were used to compare our efforts and determine effectiveness as teachers. Monetary incentive bonuses were awarded to teachers when students' test scores rose or a number of scores moved out of the bottom quartile. Schools received large sums of discretionary money and public recognition when students' scores improved. When scores went down, or did not show adequate gains, districts were required to submit a plan for improvement. If scores continued to slip the state department of education could legally sanction the district and replace key administrative personnel.

As a parent my experiences with assessment have been similar and equally as frustrating. Erin and Ryane were avid readers and writers when they entered first grade. They lost interest in both as they trudged through a system that defined what they read in terms of their ability to identify phonetic patterns and repeat syllabication rules, what they wrote in terms of grammar and punctuation, and what they knew in terms of their test scores. Though the emphasis on standardized test scores has lessened since our

move from South Carolina many of the problems associated with assessment persist. As high school students they see assessment as something "done to them." Tests are typically multiple-choice, true/false, or short answers measuring memorization of dates, vocabulary, or algorithms rather than creativity, problem solving or application. Frequently their feedback consists of a score but not a list of incorrect answers, thus allowing no opportunity for them to learn from their errors. Seldom are they made aware of the criteria for evaluation of a project, paper, or presentation ahead of time. After almost 12 years of schooling, their assessments tragically have no meaning for me as a parent or for my daughters as students related to their growth and development as life-long learners.

#### My Assumptions About Good Assessment

Just as it was important to make my position within the research explicit, it was important to explore my assumptions about good assessment.

- Assessments should be an integral part of instruction, so that it is difficult to ascertain what is instruction and what is assessment. As an integrated part of the curriculum, assessment must be congruent with and relevant to the goals, objectives and content of the program.

- Assessments should be authentic. Thus, efforts should be made to avoid assessments that put students in artificial, or contrived situations, or divert students from their natural learning process. Assessments should include realistic constraints of time, tools, and resources.

- Assessment should incorporate a wide variety of methods including, but not limited to: collections (portfolios) of representative work chosen collaboratively by the teacher and the student, video and/or audio tapes of their work, records of systematic observations occurring at different times and under different circumstances, fieldnotes and/or transcripts of conversations and interviews, and summaries of students' work as individuals and in groups.

- Assessments should recognize the diversity of individual students and allow for differences in rates and styles of learning. Assessment should take into consideration students' abilities in English, their stage of language acquisition, and whether they have been given sufficient time and opportunity to develop proficiency in their native language as well as English.

- Assessments should be broadly-based and demonstrate what students **can** do, focusing on their overall strengths and progress rather than on what they cannot do or do not know.

- Assessment should be a collaborative process involving the students, parents, teacher, school, and community. Input from parents and community members about students' experiences outside school should be used in planning instruction and assessing student learning. Assessment information should be shared with parents on a regular basis in a form and language they can understand.

- Assessments should encourage students to evaluate their own work and their learning in a reflective, continuous manner.

- Assessments should not only address what students can do independently but what they can accomplish in cooperation and collaboration with others and with the assistance of resources of all kinds.

- Assessments should actively involve students in decision-making, constructing meaning, and deepening understanding as they interact with other students, adults, and resources.

- Assessments should be engaging and rich rather than simplistic and uninteresting. They should contain numerous possibilities and a strong potential for connections and extensions. They should naturally lead to additional questions and problems. Assessments should be thought provoking, require complex thinking and problem solving, and foster sustained attention.

### Portfolio Committee

Shortly after the December meeting with Thurber's faculty, Aaron Jones told me the teachers wanted to explore the possibility of using math portfolios as an alternative form of assessment. "We are," Aaron commented, "already keeping reading and writing portfolios. Looking at math portfolios will help us extend and refine what we're doing." Several teachers volunteered to be on a committee to study the idea. Aaron suggested the committee might define what math portfolios would look like at Thurber and present their ideas to the faculty by the end of this school year. School-wide implementation would occur next year. The math supervisor from the district office would be part of the committee and provide information and support during the process. I indicated I would be interested in sitting in on those meetings since moves towards portfolio assessment in math would fit with my research interest.

Meetings of the math portfolio committee began in January and occurred again in February, March and May. Participating in the conversations were fifth grade teacher Ann McMann, third grade teacher Patty Goodrich, Chapter One teacher Madge James, and Special Education teacher Sara Wallace, Aaron Jones, the district's math supervisor Wanda Allen and myself. The work with the portfolio committee provided insights into how teachers made sense of an

alternative form of assessment and caused me to begin thinking about how the process of *making sense* was connected to their beliefs about learning and instruction.

Participating on the math portfolio committee influenced my research in several ways. Through the meetings I was able to get to know several of the teachers on a more informal basis. Over snacks after school the group raised questions, shared their beliefs, addressed issues, and imagined possibilities. The meetings both broadened and narrowed my focus on assessment. Meeting conversations reflected many of the issues being raised on the state and national levels. Committee members questions and comments brought theoretical and policy discussion to the lived-world of the classroom. At the same time the committee meetings reminded me of the need to explore classroom assessments as well as standardized, norm-referenced tests.

*January 24* - With the exception of the math specialist from the district office everyone participating on the math portfolio committee sat at the octagonal table in Madge James' Chapter One room. As we munched on the remains of Patty's popcorn, Ann began the conversation by asking a question.

Ann:           So are we doing this (portfolio) for the student

or are we doing this for next year (to pass on to the next year's teachers)?

Aaron: We're doing this for the student. ... so the student can watch his own growth.

Madge: In Hamilton County they used the portfolios as a way also of reporting to parents.

Sara: It's a way for us to justify the growth of the child without having to use standardized testing.

Madge: It also is a mental check for yourself.

Aaron: It's for us and the children, so that our children can begin to have ownership of their learning. Any other thoughts on **why** we're doing this?

Patty: Accountability. I'll know what the class is doing. Planning will be better. I'll be able to know them better as **individuals** by looking through their portfolios....

Most all the members arrived thinking the committee would meet two or three times to establish school-wide guidelines for what would go into math portfolios so implementation could begin in the fall. Instead the committee raised difficult issues, realized there were no easy answers, and discovered the process of defining portfolio assessment might be more involved and take longer than they imagined. Members had definitions of portfolios based on their experiences, their reading and their beliefs about learning,

instruction, and assessment. It was interesting to watch the dynamics of the group as members explained their perspectives. Chapter One teacher, Madge James visibly stiffened when the group questioned her definition of a portfolio as "a place for students to display their best work." The silence following Sara's comment that they (Thurber) needed to do a better job bringing parents into the portfolio process suggested that parental involvement was an issue no one was ready to address.

*February 24* Once again Ann began the committee's conversations by asking a question. The school district's math coordinator was present at this meeting and brought new perspectives to the discussion.

Ann: How much are the children allowed to choose what they want to go in it (portfolio)?

Madge: They should be able to choose all of it.

Ann: All of it?

Madge: It's their work. The thing I liked in Hamilton County ... they (students) selected. The teachers, I think, encouraged them and maybe asked them why did you select this piece. It (portfolio) showed growth that they could see that we don't.

Math Coordinator:... if you want to communicate with parents



or to the students how they are doing relative to the goals of the program - not relative to how they are growing against their own entry level but ... how they are making progress against some set standard - then I think the teacher needs to ask that a certain document... or product be put in. I don't always think that the student is able to say I'll put this in to show how I'm doing against that standard. I think sometimes the professional opinion needs to go in there. There does reach a point in my thinking about portfolios where there is a balance between student selected and teacher selected pieces.

Patty: The portfolio can serve, in my opinion, both purposes as long as the child understands the need for both sides. I think my children understand that I'm responsible for their learning. For me to show what I know about you this is what I've chosen. After watching and observing you this is what I think has been your best work. This is when I see your growth at your best, or maybe, at your worst and compare.

Aaron: Once children understand what the portfolio is I would venture to say it will get to the point that there's not going to be a big difference between

what **they** perceive as their best work and what we perceive as their best work.

At the beginning of the meeting Madge had said portfolios would provide a way for students "... to see their own growth and to measure themselves against themselves instead of against something else." That represented quite a different perspective than the math coordinator's desire to have the portfolio show "they are making progress against some set standard." How committee members thought about portfolios seemed connected to how they think about learning. Though talking about more holistic forms of assessment, the math coordinator's position focused on comparing students' competencies to a predetermined standard. Similar debates about outcomes, standards and national assessments was being played out at the state and national levels.

*March 24* The conversation about standards the committee had in February troubled Aaron. He mentioned it several times during the month to committee members and came to the March meeting with a copy of a scoring rubric from a National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publication (Stenmark, 1991). His concern focused on the hierarchical nature of the rubric and the similarity between the rubric's levels and traditional letter grades.

## A GENERAL RUBRIC FOR OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

### Top Level

- \* Contains a complete response with clear, coherent, unambiguous, and elegant explanation
- \* Includes clear and simple diagram
- \* Communicates effectively to an identified audience
- \* Shows understanding of the question's mathematical ideas and processes
- \* Identifies all the important elements of the question
- \* Includes examples and counter examples
- \* Gives strong supporting arguments
- \* Goes beyond the requirements of the problem

### Second level

- \* Contains a good solid response with some of the characteristics above, but probably not all
- \* Explains less elegantly, less completely
- \* Does not go beyond requirements of the problem

### Third level

- \* Contains a complete response, but the explanation may be muddled
- \* Presents arguments but incomplete
- \* Includes diagrams but inappropriate or unclear
- \* Indicates understanding of mathematical ideas, but not expressed clearly

#### Fourth level

- \* Omits significant parts or all of the question and response
- \* Has major errors
- \* Uses inappropriate strategies

Aaron: What they've done here is established levels: four, three, two, and the top level. To me level one is an A, level two is B, level three is a C and level four is a D. So what they've reverted to is ... judging the child's work based on the criteria. What this is saying to me is we are back to the old way of doing things ....

Sara: To me this is criterion referenced. You're looking at what it is and you're saying here's what I think a kid needs to do, here's the next step. So all you're doing is giving them the criteria of what you expect. I don't see an A, B, C, D in this.

Patty: Isn't the whole thing progress and making suitable progress versus obtaining... [a particular standard]. You're looking at not only the product but the product through the progress that's made. You've been able to see that using ...

Sara: .. this criteria

Ann: I think that our own set of criteria would be much more applicable to our school philosophy than to take something that's already canned.

Aaron: But even if we develop our criteria... My point is if I am going to give a child the time he needs to grow how can I hold criteria over him at any time?

Sara: You can. You have to hold them accountable for some measure of progress.

Aaron: I don't have any problem with that [criteria]. What I think we are going to be faced with is having to set some sort of standards.

Sara: And I don't think that's so bad. What you don't want is a set of rules saying by the end of third grade you'll have all these things done. Like the old Standards of Learning (SOL's).

Aaron: In other words, don't take the portfolio and put it into that framework.

Ann: That's what I'm afraid ....

Sara: I'm really afraid of that.

The portfolio meetings generated new questions at every turn. Aaron defined standards as "such a high goal only a few will achieve that level." He believed not being able to reach the standard would frustrate students and inhibit performance. Sara believed standards of were essential.

"They're an ideal. Only the professional writer," she states, "will ever reach the highest standards in writing. Within the framework of standards, teachers and students can set short-term goals. Then progress can be measured based on students' pursuit of the short-term goals." The discussions paralleled those occurring at the national level. Grant Wiggins (1993) and others argue convincingly for standards and authentic, thought-provoking, meaningful national assessment. Others, such as Stanford's Elliott Eisner (1993) suggest "if we value student work that displays ingenuity and complexity, we must look beyond 'standards' for evidence of achievement" (p. 22). It was fascinating to see the debate played out at the local level as the committee grappled with difficult issues and raise important questions.

The portfolio committee meetings were an important component in my research process. In transcribing and analyzing the tapes of the meetings questions reoccurred and I began to construct connections. I was repeatedly drawn to particular aspects of the research. The link between how educators make sense of assessment and their beliefs about teaching, learning and instruction fascinated me. In each meeting I was surprised by connections I had not anticipated revealed in casual references, inconsistencies or silence. I was struck too by how much more meaning and urgency the

conversations acquired when we talked about particular children. Teachers constructed assessment theory and practice, it seemed to me, were most important in terms of their consequences for children and their day-to-day lives in schools.

In the year since our first meeting the portfolio committee has continued to meet. Throughout Tony's story has provided a point of entry and a basis for shared understanding. Discussions about portfolios often center on how alternative assessment practices and changes in instructional models might make a difference for students. In August Aaron, Ann, Sara and Madge developed a plan for professional development workshops to support Thurber's move toward a whole language philosophy and encourage faculty members to explore alternative forms of assessment in their classrooms. The plan, presented to the district superintendent, was partially approved and several inservice programs have been conducted since. The committee's efforts to incorporate journal writing and small discussion groups have met with varying success.

Aaron, Ann, Sara, Madge and I have made presentations twice during the 1993-94 school year: October at the Virginia Association of Teachers of English, Roanoke, VA, and April at the National Council of Teachers of English Portfolio Series, Portfolios for Learning and Beyond:

Portfolios, Reflection, and Teacher Research, Baltimore, MD. Each time we have explored the fit between theory and practice as we examined how our beliefs about learning, teaching and assessment are played out in the real-world of classrooms. With each panel presentation and discussion the importance of our process of raising questions, looking at our practice, reading, and engaging in conversation with others has been affirmed.

### Literacy Exchange

For a week early in August 1993, I joined twenty teachers, reading specialists, university faculty, state reading coordinators, and classroom teachers in attending the first Literacy Exchange conducted by Denny Taylor. We met at the New England Center, a beautiful conference center nestled in a heavily wooded corner of the University of New Hampshire in Durham. We came from as near as Dover, a small town just minutes northeast of Durham, and as far as Salt Lake City, Utah. Though diverse in background, age, sex, and race, we shared an interest in literacy and a commitment to making a difference in our own lives and the lives of others. The week was busy and intense as we moved from sharing our personal literacy configurations to explorations of community and critical literacies.

Our week began as we gathered for the first time and



shared the print we'd collected by doing a literacy dig in our homes. As I explained each piece to my partner and she did the same, we constructed our literate selves. Questions and issues raced through my mind as I listened and examined the pieces I had brought to share. Though an avid reader and writer, I had never given my personal literacy configuration much thought. I had never really considered the sheer volume of print that's part of my everyday life, much less how and why it was produced, its assumptions and hidden meanings. My values and beliefs were reflected in the literate self I constructed. Why had I included notes from family and friends, my appointment calendar, and books I was reading but not my journal or any of my stories, poems, or academic writing? Would the artifacts assembled have been different if someone else had surveyed my home or office and selected the print that would represent me? If I had a traffic citation or an overdrawn check would I have brought those? Were the experiences associated with some print too personal, too embarrassing, too painful? Perhaps the artifacts I did not bring were as important to my personal literacy configuration as those I brought. It seemed important that I had the power to control the literate self I constructed in this setting.

The personal literacy dig challenged me to think about literacy configurations in relation to my work and Tony's

experiences in school: of literacy configurations inscribed in test scores, reduced to strips of numbers, and filed permanently in cumulative folders; of labels applied to students, separating them, defining them, and limiting their educational opportunities; of judgments made and shared in teachers' lounges, faculty meetings or casual conversations. Their summative and normative worth valued, institutional representations are a significant part of students' literacy configurations in school. Yet students have no control over the content or production.

Power and control were key issues again as the focus of the Literacy Exchange shifted to critical literacies. I was unprepared for the impact our discussions and the interactions with a young woman involved in Denny's City Literacies Project would have on me. Denny had said little about Kathryn prior to her visit on Wednesday evening. Kathryn had been pregnant, homeless and addicted to cocaine when they first met. Clinically diagnosed as manic depressive, she had been hospitalized, lost her home, her job, her children, her freedom, and her dignity. I wasn't prepared for the black leather jeans, the mesh sleeveless vest and the fuschia spandex top or the tatoos of tigers and butterflies stretching up her arms, across one shoulder and ending on her cheek. Nor was I prepared for the beauty and emotion of her poetry. She wrote in simple yet eloquent

terms of love and loss, of hurt and anger, of confidence and despair. Her poetry, an emotional lifeline like the physical armor of dress and tatoos, covered invisible scars of abuse, loss, abandonment, and betrayal. Kathryn's literacy, however, was not defined by her poetry, by the sensitivity of her words, or the power of her emotions. Rather it was defined in bureaucratic texts by social services, doctors, and the police. Her life was encoded in print: delinquency, dependency, pathology, and irresponsibility.

There are thousands of children in schools whose literacies do not fit mainstream definitions. Thousands of children whose institutional representations have already labeled, coded, stigmatized and segregated them. Bureaucratic texts will, as they have for Kathryn, continue to define their literacy, their worth, and their opportunities. Tony could not control how he was described within the school community. His identity as the "carnival-boy," a non-reader and non-writer was constructed by others. He did not have the power to determine how and when his literacy abilities would be assessed or even by whom. Nor could he decide what skills, processes or products might best represent his literacy abilities. Others defined and administered the assessment measures, analyzed the results, and summarized Tony's literacy abilities as lacking,

"borderline," and below his peers. It was this representation that would move with Tony from school to school and from class to class. This representation, over which Tony could exercise no control, would become his institutional identity and define his worth, and determine his educational opportunities unless something was done to disrupt the expected flow.

The Literacy Exchange in 1993 helped clarify and focus several aspects of my research from the previous school year. The experience expanded my definition of literacy and forced me to acknowledge the importance of continuing to broaden and challenge my definitions. Through the Literacy Exchange I connected with others who shared my interest in the construct and consequences of literacy assessment for children and my passionate commitment to making a difference. Working with the teachers involved in the Biographic Literacy Profiles Project reassured me that changes in the way students' literacy-learning is assessed can occur and challenged me to imagine possibilities. The Literacy Exchange affirmed my perspective that assessment is more than a technical problem; it is also a *people* problem. Peter Johnston (1992) suggests, "assessment is a set of interpretive and representational practices underlain by cultural beliefs, organizations, and relationships. Assessment has to do with how we know and represent

ourselves and each other as literate individuals in a literate society." (p. 1).

### Tony as "Point of Entry"

Initially my work with Tony was not intended to be part of the research I was doing on assessment. I was working with Tony because I was captivated personally and professionally by him and his situation. Creating an environment for an hour once or twice a week where he could be successful and begin to see himself as a literate person seemed adequate. By the end of the 92-93 school year Tony had been identified by his fourth grade teacher as a non-reader and non-writer, referred and evaluated for special education placement, and labeled by the psychologist confidential report as having "borderline abilities." Being a mentor and supporting his learning at school was no longer sufficient.

Though I became more involved with Tony and considered myself an advocate for him, I hesitated to make his story the focus of my dissertation. It is not what my committee expects, I argued. It is not the original focus of my research. There are lots of things I do not know and ca not ask because of his family situation. Besides, Tony's situation is probably too idiosyncratic. Others disagreed. "Who cares about a bunch of teachers fumbling around trying

to make sense of assessment," a friend suggested. "Tony's story is important because of the issues it raises." At the Literacy Exchange I shared Tony's story and sought advice on how best to advocate for him. I was stunned when Denny Taylor prefaced her suggestions with the comment, "He should be your dissertation, you know."

As I read and analyzed fieldnotes, transcripts, journal entries, and documents and wrote proposals for papers, I kept coming back to Tony and focusing on his situation. Tony's story was integrally linked to many of the issues and questions I constructed about assessment. Sharing Tony's story would provide a "point of entry" (Smith, 1987) into the issues and questions I wanted to address. Authentic stories, David Berliner (1992) suggests, offers one way "to influence the policy and practice of education" (p.159). Noddings and Witherall (1991) explicate the value of stories further. They state:

We learn from stories. More important, we come to understand - ourselves, and even the subjects we teach and learn. Stories engage us....

Stories can help us to understand by making the abstract concrete and accessible. What is dimly perceived at the level of principle may become vivid and powerful in the concrete. Further, stories motivate us. Even that which we understand at the

abstract level may not move us to action, whereas a story often does.... Finally, stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might have been changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. (pp. 279-280).

Stories such as Tony's can make a contribution to an understanding of the construct and consequences of classroom assessment. Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg (1991) argue that case studies ground observations in concrete situations, provide holistic multi-perspective explanations of events, show how processes work over time and lead to strong theoretical insights and generalizations. Tony's story would allow me to generalize from the specific situation I investigated to theories of such events. Walton (1992) suggests:

The processes of coming to grips with a particular empirical instance, of reflecting on what it is a case of, and contrasting it with other case models, are all

practical steps toward constructing theoretical interpretations. And it is for that reason, paradoxically, that case studies are likely to produce the best theory. (Walton, 1992, p.129)

Stories such as Tony's allow individuals participating in processes or situations similar to those described to re-think basic preconceptions and categories (Wieviorka, 1992), and draw on them as modes of how things work and the basis for imagining how things might be changed.

### Data Collection

Drawing on Denny Taylor's (1990) notion of "personal literacy configurations," I began in December 1992. to observe how Tony used print in and out of school to help solve problems and for functional, recreational, or social reasons. I constructed a literacy profile of Tony based on multiple sources of information such as observations, conversations, meetings, and documents.

Participant Observation. As a participant observer at Thurber Intermediate School over an extended period of time I moved with Tony from the classroom to the lunchroom or playground. I worked beside Tony as he completed class assignments, talked with and about family and friends, and created narratives linking his in-school experiences to his



out-of-school world. I interacted with teachers, administrators, parents, and community volunteers in both formal (classroom, faculty meetings, inservice workshops, interviews, PTA meetings) and informal settings (teachers' lounge, lunches, school fairs). I also interacted with Tony outside of school: visiting his home, going to the library, shopping for comic books, eating at fast food restaurants, or just "hanging out." Many of these occasions were audiotaped and transcribed. All were recorded in fieldnotes written as soon as possible after the event. In addition to their descriptive value, observational fieldnotes collected in this fashion allow me to situate and contextualize other forms of data collected: documents, Tony's work, and interviews (see Briggs, 1986).

It was impossible to record all of the data available during the course of my observations. Hammersly and Atkinson (1989) suggest that "however exact and detailed the description, [the ethnographer] acquires a series of multitudinous impressions ... [which] may be of the greatest service when it comes to interpreting the beliefs and practices of a ... society" (p.144). As I elaborated on fieldnotes and wrote in my journal I tried to explicitly spell out successes and difficulties, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases and ideas.

During the fall of the 1993-94 school year I was able

to use a laptop computer to record observational fieldnotes. This worked particularly well in Ann McMann's class, allowing me to record discussions verbatim rather than in notes. Recording observational fieldnotes directly into the computer during the day permitted me to spend time in the evenings analyzing and elaborating on my notes rather than recopying. Using the laptop did not work as well during meetings. I had difficulty focusing on my role as a participant and typing the notes into the computer. After several frustrating attempts to do both I returned to my previous practice of taping and transcribing each meeting.

Following observations and meetings I would make my fieldnotes available to the participants. I would attach a note that described something interesting or exciting that happened in the classroom or meeting, focused on an issue I identified in the data, and asked for feedback. Most often I closed with: "Please don't hesitate to share your comments, questions, concerns, or criticisms of the fieldnotes. Your input makes the notes richer and perhaps more useful for us both." The fieldnotes were graciously accepted but the feedback was limited to an occasional "thanks." As difficult as it was to accept I had to acknowledge and respect their priorities.

Documents. Documents were an important component of my

ethnographic study. I collected official documents such as cumulative records, test scores, and report cards not because of what they told me about Tony but for what they revealed about the institutional structure of the classroom, school, or district (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Juxtaposing the official documents with my observations and interviews provided interesting insights.

I also collected informal documents (Tony's journal, learning log, reports, etc. as well as teachers' notes and assessments). They offered a source of "sensitizing concepts" and revealed ways the "authors... organize their experience, the sorts of imagery and 'situated vocabularies' they employ, the routine events, and the troubles and reactions they encounter..." (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p. 130). It was important to recognize "documents were written in a social context, with some audience in mind, even if the audience is only the author" (Delamont, 1992, p. 105). Just as I tried to remain skeptical of what was said to me, I attempted to be skeptical of documents, reading and examining each in relation to their social context (Delamont, 1992). I was keenly aware of the fact that journals, memos, notes to parents, assessment narratives, and student response sheets are written within the social context of the classroom and the school.

Often I was present when the document was constructed.

In those cases I paid particular attention to the process of construction. I would note whether Tony was working independently or with a group, how members interacted, what additional resources he used in constructing the text and what interactions (if any) he had with adults during the process. I wrote as nearly as possible verbatim accounts of the questions Tony asked, the observations and comments he made and the responses he received from others. In notes written as soon as possible, I tried to situate the document within the broader context of the classroom and school. If I was not present when the document was written, I made every effort to ascertain the circumstances of its production. I would in many cases ask Tony and the teacher to describe what was going on while the document was completed. At times details surrounding the process of producing the document were lost. With the exception of official documents (i.e. tests administered as part of the psychological evaluation) and some items included in his fourth grade portfolio, I was present as Tony constructed the documents included in my text.

### Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process beginning with the formulation and clarification of orientating questions to frame my activities and sensitize me to the issues and

continuing into the writing phase of the study. Formally, it encompassed my fieldnotes, journal and analytic memos. On an informal level it included my ideas and hunches (Ely et.al., 1991; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989). Data analysis was an integral part of the research as "theory building and data collection are dialectically linked" (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p.174). My analysis became increasingly more focused as the research progressed allowing the study to be "developed or transformed, and eventually its scope ... clarified and delimited and its internal structure explored" (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1989, p. 175). Progressive focusing precipitated a gradual shift in my emphasis, from a description of events and processes to the development of possible explanations and interpretations.

Metaphors were perhaps the most helpful tool in analyzing the data I had collected. As I read fieldnotes and transcripts, I asked myself "What does this remind me of?" and searched for metaphors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) to enhance my understanding. I pushed the applicability of the metaphor until I began to see places where the comparison broke down. Then I looked for a new metaphor. For example, one of my first metaphors compared the assessment process to a window. In an analytical memo I wrote:

In many ways I've come to think of assessment as a window. It allows us (teachers and others interested

in teaching and learning) to see what children can do as they make sense of the world from their perspective, solve problems, and construct knowledge. Through our window we can see children's learning as situated within various communities of practice and mediated by their interactions with human and technological resources. But let me define our window a bit more specifically. Imagine for a moment a window just after dawn or just before dusk, when the intensity of light outside is almost equal the light inside. It is then that our window does more than allow us to see what is beyond. It is then that we can also see our own reflected image in the window.

The analogy makes an important point about assessment, I think. We have always used assessment as our window for looking at children. Obviously that is crucial. Yet I would argue that looking at ourselves (individually and collectively) is an equally important aspect of assessment, one which has received very little attention in educational literature. We need to examine our beliefs, values, and practice. Unless those kinds of things are fleshed out, discussed and critically examined we are only addressing part of the assessment issue. Letting the assessment window reflect and focus our gaze on our beliefs, values, and

our practices, leads naturally to discussions about teacher bias, curriculum, instruction, and how we use time and space.

The window metaphor was important in helping me analyze my observations, see connections and make interpretations. It was also important to push the metaphor to see if it continued to fit. As I wrote I determined that the window metaphor was not adequate. My description of the window did not capture the ongoing, interactional nature of assessment. Further, window implied a limited field of vision. Yes, a window allowed the observer to see the context as well as the child, but it did not offer a glimpse of the broad context or history. Metaphors became an analytical tool that let me manipulate and expand my thinking.

Throughout the research as I read and reread fieldnotes, listened and transcribed tapes, and examined documents, I raised questions and made connections. Marginal notes or post-its added to fieldnotes and transcripts would reflect different ways of thinking about a situation and insights I had based on my reading or something that had happened at a later time. I wrote personal reflections about fieldnotes and transcripts in my journal rather than including them in the texts I was sharing with those involved in the study. Periodically I would inventory the major ideas I construed from fieldnotes,

transcripts, documents and my journal. Indexing what I had inevitably lead to greater understanding and new connections. Participation in data analysis, roundtable, and panel discussions at conferences encouraged ongoing analysis and reorganization of my data into a coherent form.

My analysis then represents my effort to use narrative structure to sort out my interpretations and understandings. It was through the process of "re-storying" that I made personal meaning of experiences and interactions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986). Connelly and Clandinin (1986) suggest that "it is when we ask ourselves the meaning of a story, and tell it in a narrative, that we reconstruct the meaning recovered in the story" (p.81) The meaning constructed and through narrative re-constructed was essentially mine. Although I weave together many voices (Tony, his family, teachers, the literature and my own) the story remains partial. It is integrally bound to whose words I chose to hear, where I chose to observe, what I chose to record, and which events I chose to include as I constructed Tony's story.

In the analysis of data I attempted to be excruciatingly self-conscious. I tried to "acknowledge interpretive authorial self and experiment with dialogic forms of ethnographic representation that place more of the ... perspectives of the researched into the narrative"



(Stacey, 1991, p.115). My work authentically reflected the dissonance and particularity of my ethnographic process (Stacey, 1991). I tried as Stacey (1991) suggests to "be rigorously self-aware ... about the partiality of its ... vision and capacity to represent ... the other" (p. 117).

APPENDIX B

FIELDWORK INDEX - THURBER PROJECT

Documents:

student self-evaluation	10/92
parent/teacher needs survey	10/92
student checklist	10/92
parent questionnaire	10/92
student response to literature	10/92
self-assessment checklist	10/92
communication Railtown City Schools	10/92
staff roster (routing slip)	10/92
schedule special classes	10/92
book list - multiple copies	10/92
building floor plan	10/92
proposal drafts & final copy	11/6/92
info Railtown County	
info Railtown City	
Thurber report card	
calendar - Railtown City Schools	
summary to parents from S	11/3/92
flyer Older Neighbor/Grandparent Day	10/29/92
<u>Thurber News</u>	10/92
<u>Railtown Times</u> article - Elizabeth Arden	
address list	1/13/93
letter about project to parents	1/14/93
LPT (closure test)	2/18/93
LPT (math)	2/23/93
presentation evaluation	2/17/93
response letters from parents	
list of students names, addresses	

Fieldnotes (chronologically)

initial mtg	9/23/92
- phys. description/impressions	
- ques. tchers raised	
- key issues:time	
involvement	
improve parent/community	
involvement	
link to teacher evaluation	
link to GE adoption program	
- negotiating access	
- defining collaborative research	
- my comment = lrning about lrning	
- set tone their input/agenda impt.	

- 5th grade - 10/7/92  
 - struggle w/ my role as researcher?  
 teacher?
- 3rd grade - 10/21/92  
 - making connection/ taking Tannen bk to CS  
 - asking L about lost books  
 - connecting w/ kids  
 - eating w/ the kids in cafeteria
- 4th grade - 10/28/92  
 - getting into schools rhythm  
 - getting to know faculty/staff  
 - J asking me to wait till following wk  
 - connecting w/ kids  
 - ESL  
 - J & M = too little time  
 scheduling  
 lack continuity  
 pulling out Chapter One kids  
 - P's: attitude toward kids  
 description K
- 4th grade - 11/4/92  
 - connecting w/ CS  
 - changing T's to M's on report cds  
 - C's perception of how kids feel about grds  
 - class structure:  
 early bird special  
 computer for vocab/spelling drill  
 spelling rotation  
 reading groups  
 Tony  
 - connecting w/ teachers eating in lounge  
 - getting to know people/places/schedule
- interview w/ C 11/24/92  
 - learning to interview  
 - math portfolio committee after holidays
- 3rd grade - 1/7/93  
 - math portfolio committee  
 - schedule of math times  
 - assessing what the understand in math  
 - how M assesses/documentation
- PTA 1/14/93  
 - tchers giving homework on PTA night  
 - C explaining: intro technology

businesses in school

mtg about businesses in schools 1/16/93

4th grade 2/10/93

- preparation for LPT
- hamburger for organizing paragraph
- LPT info
- preparation for IOWA - Test Best
- what about Tony on test day - disappear
- M teaching latitude/longitude
- J learn from mistakes

4th grade - 2/17/93

- administration LPT
- deciding to spend more time in J's room
- Tony
- self-evaluation guidelines

math assessment portfolio mtg (MAPS) 1/24/93

- Who are we doing portfolios for?
- Who owns the portfolio?
- Why are we doing portfolio?
  - \* show growth
  - \* identify & organize best work
  - \* accountability
  - \* reporting to parents
  - \* monitoring progress
  - \* relating learning to outcomes & standards
  - \* building self-esteem
- How are portfolio and assessment related?
- Drawing on other experiences/ models

math assessment portfolio mtg (MAPS) 2/24/93

- Who needs portfolio?
- tchers willingness to rethink/change
- different perspectives about portfolios/ negotiating meaning
- measuring against self or against standard?
- Is portfolio a product or a process?
- Who decides "best" work?
- link to student self-esteem
- ownership
- motivation, pride
- how to get students actively involved
- valuing students' perspectives, individualism

- portfolio as opportunity for goal setting
  - conferencing
  - self-assessment
  - student, teacher, parent chosen?
  - for accountability
  - being part of larger conversations
  - developing our own portfolios
  - how to involve parents?
- 3rd grade - 3/1/93
- transcript of self- and group evaluation
- 3rd grade - 3/5/93
- 4th grade - 3/10/93
- Tony
  - IOWA preparation
- portfolios for parent interviews 3/18/93
- LL #1 concern curriculum
  - L about Tony
- portfolios, interview w/ parents 3/19/93
- my observations about Thurber portfolios
  - LL comment: not enough time file in portfolio
  - ideas surfacing during fieldwork
- conversation w/Tony 3/23/93
- learning to help w/ baby
  - learning to talk
  - knowing how to diaper, make formula, burp
  - help from J or friends
  - learn from movies
  - L
  - helping another student
  - human cannonball
- math assessment port. committee 3/24/93
- M developing her own portfolio
  - is a rubric hierarchial just like grades?
  - child's criteria, teacher's criteria?
  - standards
  - child understanding themselves as learner  
literate person
  - presenting portfolio to teacher next yr.
  - importance of **reflection** on learning/growth
  - self-assessment
  - portfolio as broad picture (rich/thick)
  - purpose of portfolio has to match philosophy

- documenting failure?
- tying portfolio into report card
- fit between portfolio and whole language
- narrative written by kids
- communicating committees process w/ others  
(teachers, kids, parents)
- portfolio as way to goal set
- 2 in assessment process (teacher & kid)
- empowering?
- control
- resistance from faculty

conversation w/ Tony 4/7/93

- encyclopedia from grocery
- figuring out how old books were
- talking about standardized tests
- doing curl ups in PE
- why new kid skipped into 4th grade
- in Chapter One w/ E

conversation w/ Tony 4/8/93

- alphabetical order worksheet
- self-assessment: only thing improving  
is writing
- report cards/grades
- self-assessment: I can't write very good.

conversation w/ Ms. Mitchell 4/19/93

- notes on CS and psychologist's comments
- physical description
- my comments to her

4th grade - 5/3/93

- wk with T on patterning
- interaction w/ F, K, T
- J's reaction: in seat, doing assigned wk

conversation w/ Tony 5/5/93

- two dimensional shapes
- Superman newspaper
- note to unscramble
- writing name on envelope
- putting wd in order of sentence
- psychologist tested on shapes
- " " on designs
- writing family names on board
- taking pictures of shapes
- self-assessments

conversation w/ Tony 5/10/93  
 - self-assessment:  
 - in my head it sounds easy, harder to do

at Tony's house 5/11/93  
 - T comments about absences  
 - comments about rubric, performance  
 - conversation w/ C cognitive coaching  
 - controlling classroom (dif. b/t tchers)  
 - stress of mandated tests @ 4th grade  
 - description Mitchell house  
 - talking about J's class  
 - division  
 - Superman comic  
 - conversation w/ Ms. Mitchell  
 - relaying father's comments  
 - go-cart cover - 9x12 tarp

conversation w/ Tony 5/17/93  
 - self-assessment:  
 - parents' comments  
 - reading test: comprehension questions  
 - self-assessment:

3rd grade - 5/19/93  
 - L's comments about Tony  
 - discussing research w/ M  
 - getting started with book in S's  
 - kids interviews w/ teachers, staff

working w/ Tony 5/25/93  
 - conversation, reading to G  
 - results of M's testing

mtg w/ portfolio committee 8/23/93  
 - resistance  
 - what about those not on board?  
 - giving them space  
 - will that sabotage school-wide effort?  
 - specific plan for presentation to Harris  
 and for inservice

inservice on portfolios 8/30/93  
 - mtg w/ J  
 - mtg w/ C  
 \* using interlocking circles  
 \* using *Good Common Schools*  
 - journey to provide student-centered program





- reading and punctuating story hospital

wk w/ Tony @ public library 9/2/93

- shoe shop sign
- *Horton Hatches the Egg*/running record
- observations about my wk w/ Tony
- finishing story about A
- using wd regurgitate

5th grade classroom observations 9/7/93

- Mr. Mitchell bringing Tony to school
- immediate inclusion in community
- index card activity
- collateral, interrupt
- pattern of writing/erasing, writing/erasing
- reactions in journal about 1st day
- read and add punctuation to journal
- hesitates/doesn't share what he's written
- *Roses are Red* poem in journal
- S: Are you going to be in 2nd grade math bk
- Little brother in that book
- negotiating role w/in group on garden
- cloze activity based on *Voirst* poem

wk w/ Tony after school 9/7/93

- *Six Chinese Brothers*/running record
- organizing stuff, calendar & assignment pad
- relating to collateral

5th grade classroom observations 9/8/93

- comments from B and L about Tony
- homework machine
- wk w/ S
- essential questions for poetry

5th grade classroom observation 9/13/93

- *Important Book* - imp thing about friend
- cinquain
- group wk on patterns
- number patterns in learning log
- cinquain: parts of speech (see list in lrning

log)

5th grade classroom observations 9/14/93

- # patterns w/ calculator
- B shares J's comments about Tony
- B says Tony bought *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
- beat, rhyme, rhythm
- free verse: doesn't have no rhyme

- not worrying about spelling & handwriting
- outside - list wds describing animal
- collateral for taking poetry books home

working w/ Tony after school 9/14/93

- copying D's code for Mortal Kombat
- newspaper: car ads
- *Six Chinese Brothers*/ running record
- butterfly: prose to free verse

mtg w/ portfolio committee 9/16/93

- plan presentation for Harris

5th grade classroom observations 9/16/93

- using mira: lines of symmetry
- personification: take a banana and....
- personification of pencil (tcher initiated presented some difficulty)
- dilemma of modeling
- literature discussion groups
- describing choices
- shares *Roses are red* poem
- Tony's our lover

5th grade classroom observations 9/20/93

- congruency
- alliteration: patterns in poetry
- L modeling
- share poem w/ class or one other person

5th grade classroom observations 9/21/93

- L assessing poetry knowledge
- self-assessment about poetry
- onomatopoeia
- B teaching Tony
- scaffolding: creating web for critter report working w/ G

conversation w/ C

- use of manipulatives in 3rd grade
- ZPD

5th grade classroom observations 9/22/93

- wk w/ group on reflection/refraction
- Sk [to Tony]: Do you want to read?  
[to me]: He can't read.
- double entry learning log
- attributes
- problem w/ staying to wk w/ me on Wed.
- dilemma know how much to push

- 5th grade classroom observations 9/23/93
- rewriting critter report
  - poachers
- 5th grade classroom observation 9/27/93
- wking w/ group on logic problems
  - how much to push/ resisting editing
  - my own questions/uncertainties
- 5th grade classroom observation 10/4/93
- Thurber dollars
  - linking science & poetry *Someone Eating Sun*
  - generating questions about sun, earth
  - graphic organizer
  - fluency w/ writing effecting ability to share what they know
  - tensions I feel in classrooms
  - not attending to classroom activity
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/6/93
- using parentheses
  - reflections on teaching B and E
  - Jordan news conference & vocab
  - journal reaction to Jordan's retirement
  - B keeping track time on task
  - conversation w/ L about being on task
  - *Frog and Toad are Friends/* running record
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/7/93
- # property test
  - computer to practice addition & subtraction
  - using M as resource
  - shadows (prediction, negotiating w/ group)
- meeting w/ portfolio committee 10/11/93
- Mike sharing info about eclipse w/ class
  - Mike: process oriented not product
  - Tony: cheating on Friday's spelling test
  - L: how to grade Tony?
  - E: inconsistent scores on test for Tina
  - notes on my focus
  - inservice: group looking at portfolio
  - looking at portfolio w/ S & M
  - roadblock for J: "We're the experts"
  - roadblock for F: "Why haven't we looked at models?"
  - gap between resisting and those making shift

- eligibility meeting 10/13/93
- positioning of people
  - M as chair
  - order of speaking
  - my report reinforced what L said
  - Ms. Mitchell late/ brought baby
  - J couched accuracy of test results b/c  
lack of previous schooling/testing
  - socio report not in Confidential file
  - L "felt defensive, not problem"
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/13/93
- Mike sharing encyclopedia art. w/me
  - diversion? different style? interests?
  - L getting Mike back on task
  - # patterns w/ zero
  - science groups: deciding what/how to present
  - conversation w/ Mike about presentation
- wk w/ Tony after school 10/13/93
- using computer to write texts for pictures
  - organizing thoughts into sentences
  - relying on environment/ previous written  
wds to help w/ spelling
  - problem solving display of pictures & text
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/14/93
- 0 in multiplication (3x10, 3x100, 3x1000)
  - told me how but didn't write in larning log  
happens frequently
  - L: defensive in eligibility mtg at  
implication there was a problem to fix
- notes after presentation @ VATE 10/17/93
- hearing myself describe my wk
    - \* Tony lens
    - \* connected to assessment issues
    - \* responsibility to continuing  
conversation w/ student teachers
  - E: her own grow, looking at portfolios
  - L: what school has done so far
    - \* wk w/ C
    - \* reading/ writing portfolio
  - M: developing her own portfolio
  - C: role of principal
- 5th grade classroom observation 10/18/93
- L: Tony's diagnostic test, not exposed to  
terminology

- 5th grade classroom observations 10/25/93
- absent for wk/ no explanation
  - J visits/ focus on her students as problems, low ability, need structure
  - blaming the student
  - L rounding (using newspaper) - math group
  - wking with E, B/ copying their answers
  - wking with L: scaffolding
  - larning log:
  - L asks D not to pull him out
  - mystery unit
  - wking in groups to classify mystery story wds
- wk w/ Tony after school 10/27/93
- reading from his library book
  - filling out order form for ring
  - unfamiliarity w/ conventions of school
  - how is his expanding literacy changing relationships w/in family?
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/28/93
- J's frustration
  - prediction about egg in bottle experiment
- mtg w/ portfolio committee 11/1/93
- talking about focus groups
  - grade level plus support staff in each group
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/1/93
- election
  - Tony inattentive in whole and small group
  - M brings D, J, Tony into discussion
  - election vocabulary/ asking M tough ques.
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/4/93
- explanation of selection for portfolio (8 required, 1 poem, letter, table contents)
  - wking w/ math group on place value
- side-by-side w/ B, E & Tony 11/5/93
- what I learned about strengths, understanding
  - how I could support learning of each
  - learning from the kind of mistakes they made
- 5th grade focus group 11/5/93
- linking sch exp to home & students' interests
  - adapting ideas to meet needs of special
  - Mike
  - separating what know about child from what

- you "see" in portfolio
  - L: building Mike's writing skills through science
  - home journal: link out of school experiences
  - "doing" school
  - kids left in P's class "can't handle it"
  - alternative ways of journalling: audio tape, dictate to student or parent, draw picture
  - roadblock P: having kids wk together might interfere w/ another tchers instruction
  - concerns of the support staff (aides) about whole language, student-oriented classroom
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/9/93
- rounding/ observing & documenting
  - vocabulary: abate & cower
  - characterization: mystery unit
  - Tony's summary of bk
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/11/93
- relationship between rounding & estimating
  - goals:
    - \* Tony: get a trophy, win a tournament, earn white belt, get married
    - \* Mike: lift water w/o touching it  
make helium
- conversation w/ LL 11/12/93
- Mike: math & writing through science
  - Tony: needed to participate  
a reader and writer  
report on vampire bat
- 5th grade focus group 11/12/93
- illegible writing, can't express himself in written form, cannot write in cursive
  - fingerprint story: wrote more when encouraged by LL to relate it to science (chemistry set)
  - reading no problem
  - attitude problem?
  - changing page # in homework assignment
  - CS: lying
  - allowing him to write in manuscript
  - need to communicate decisions to middle sch
  - instigator in situation w/ S
  - spelling atrocious
  - can't understand need to spell or do math
  - disorganized
  - most of LL's comments negative

- options: computer, mentor, wk w/ K, testing for LD, testing for ADHD, hearing check
  - LL's frustration
  - discussion focuses on problem located w/in Mike, other than changing to manuscript and use of computer no discussion of curriculum or methods of instruction
- 4th grade focus group 11/12/93
- A sharing her philosophy
  - J: low capabilities of class began w/ spelling chapter of Routeman didn't read 1st chapter
- 3rd grade focus group 11/12/93
- R: Routeman bk *Transitions*
  - F: What goes around comes around. None of this is new. I've been doing it for yrs. Way we were taught @ Indiana
  - F: What's our focus?
  - roadblock MF: I'm overwhelmed
  - roadblock MM: overwhelmed by volume info on portfolios, diversity of opinions
  - roadblock MF: too many interruptions, not enough instructional time
  - M: still saving everything
  - F: parents wanted to see
  - roadblock F: we're not together on this
  - description what L and S did w/ portfolios
  - M: want to give good view of total child
- 3rd grade focus group 11/19/93
- roadblock MF: this article about affluent district in Chicago, not **ordinary**
  - looking at social and emotional development
  - roadblock F: not enough instructional time not enough time to read no time to have them look at
  - B: looking at kids to build on strengths
  - F: been doing it,
  - C: collection of work, memory box
  - B: having to remold myself to somebody
- 4th grade focus group 11/19/93
- A: difficulty keeping running record making checklist of what kids' had done assessing on writing and content some understood couldn't communicate in

- J: rotations allow me to hear everyone read  
some still struggling w/ basic phonetic rules  
using notes, portfolios in conferences  
w/ parents analyzing errors on math test  
not enough time  
feel like I've educated myself  
has to defend herself and program to family  
are you able to wk with Tony individually?

5th grade focus group 11/19/93

- what does Mike want?
- do we individualize completely?
- N: good at "kidwatching" not at documenting  
what we see
- L: taping reading to do running record
- L: W's question about vampire bats & rabies
- L: E giving class story map to figure out
- N: empowering kids
- L: frustration w/ Mike's disorganization,

3rd grade focus group 12/3/93

- fourth grade didn't meet too busy, not enough  
instructional time w/ kids
- fifth grade didn't meet
- W: do we have criteria?  
what is authentic assessment?  
do we include standardized tests?  
what is purpose?  
does portfolio include interests of  
tchers, parents, school and district?
- F: criticism can be harmful
- C: why not just history of child's year?  
why not a showcase that shows growth
- W: have to justify to "higher ups"  
how do you justify to child if you want  
something in portfolio they don't  
should have both tcher & student input
- M: should help them know they don't have to  
be perfect
- roadblock M: dragging feet because of lack of

staff mtg on portfolios 12/8/93

- brainstorm list of ideas for tcher portfolios
- tchers should own their portfolios/ decide  
what to put in them
- who owns students portfolio? they might only  
put good work
- trusting teachers judgment



- w/ ownership comes responsibility
- more than we've done in past
- some don't know how to make choices
- begin to teach them/ give them opportunities
- everybody does not have to do the same thing
- time frame
- make plan for your classroom

conversation w/ L 12/15/93  
 - had Tony show me cursive

conversation w/ C 12/17/93  
 - re-evaluating where we are  
 - how to move to next step

Letters to teachers to accompany transcripts/fieldnotes

to L & B 10/9/93  
 - running record  
 - definition of reflection (E)  
 - teacher role

to M 10/17/93  
 - how do we talk about change w/ others  
 - how Mike avoids doing what group is doing

to 10/17/93  
 - portfolio documents meaningless w/o context  
 - need for ongoing picture

to 11/2/93  
 - E's definition of cloning  
 - Tony looking at others work

to N 11/15/93  
 - election vocabulary: what was purpose?  
 - documenting

to P 11/15/93  
 - working w/ group of LL's students  
 - communicating what we observe

to L & B 11/15/93  
 - place value: what I observed about my group  
 - communicating what we observe  
 - Mike

to B 12/10/93  
 - inclusion  
 - wking w/ colleagues

Journal w/ M - \* M's entries

- \* 3/29/93 1st entry in portfolio journal
- \* 4/13/93 philosophy about children, learning  
inclusion: On Common Ground
- \* 4/19/93 collaboration  
changes/growth in wking w/ tchers  
trust: CS's trust in her ability
- \* 4/27/93 children must trust to feel free to construct  
knowledge
- \* 5/2/93 goals: cognitive coaching  
develop co-tching skills  
develop "whole" tching mentality
- 5/4/92 laying beliefs on the table  
Maxine Greene: imagining possibilities  
trust:CS in M  
P's/L's in kids abilities  
relinquishing measure of control  
someone gave you (and me) permission to  
construct provided support as needed  
complexity: why change/growth breaks down =  
fragility  
**by empowering some what are we doing to  
others?**
- \* 6/15/93 inadequacy of existing evaluation instruments  
need to be part of changes occurring in  
education  
CS motivates by discussing ideas  
need for time to process  
will alternative assessment allow time for  
kids to process  
locus of control w/ tcher? w/ student?  
locus of control w/ student authenticates  
tchers thinking professionals, facilitators  
need for network of support  
resistance to change  
allowing children to fail w/in supportive  
changing, shifting beliefs  
molding clay metaphor
- 7/19/93 how I was evaluated in SC  
fit between performance base & need to give  
some students more time  
high standards fit w/ honoring  
question / molding clay metaphor
- 8/23/93 perspective  
control  
trust necessary to construct own knowledge  
appropriate talk: academic discourse  
reading people

changing paradigms  
 my role at Thurber  
 ideas for portfolio inservice  
 \* 9/5/93 more link w/ reality in talk w/ stu tchers  
 \* 9/9/93 how other tchers perceive her kids  
 wking w/ other teachers, defining space  
 offer to MM & MF, technology in classroom  
 nts. from class  
 9/10/93 modeling what we believe about tching  
 theory v reality & practice  
 problem - kids dispersed in other classes  
 need for tchers to ask selves TOUGH questions  
 J warring w/ self: theory v practice  
 \* 9/14/93 L: can't go on till know they're ready  
 lack of knowledge about stu. tching exp.  
 9/15/93 class  
 M portfolio: living document  
 M's support of Tony in LL's classroom  
 portfolio inservice: Linda's beliefs  
 body language  
 \* 9/17/93 class notes  
 9/20/93 inclusion  
 assessment/portfolios: need for context  
 artifacts alone not enough  
 need for systematic observation  
 supporting student learning  
 \* 9/21/93 advantages inclusion  
 assessment: how to observe  
 growth: personal/professional  
 meeting w/ H  
 \* 9/24/93 class notes  
 performance assessment  
 9/26/93 photos/tests/assessments capture sliver of  
 time/ability  
 meaning of wk must go beyond Tony/immediate  
 performance assessment: just like grades?  
 assessment class  
 community of learners  
 \* 10/1/93 class notes  
 10/13/93 questioning our own teaching  
 critical friend  
 eligibility meeting  
 \* 10/15/93 class notes  
 authentic audience  
 \* 10/24/93 looking beyond the obvious  
 10/25/93 overview  
 planning backwards  
 concrete examples  
 documentation

- strengths: fit between beliefs / practice  
 what I learned from teaching the class
- \* 10/29/93 last class: performance assessments
  - \* 10/31/93 looking at your teaching  
 how now to look at Mary Ann's practice
  - 11/3/93 evaluating stu tchers performance assessments  
 & portfolios
  - 11/5/93 literacy: what do I believe about it?  
 what was gained by focus group mtg on Mike?  
 documenting learning
  - \* 11/16/93 literacy  
 group discussions  
 time  
 case load
  - 11/19/93 spelling  
 learning: what I believe  
 environment that promotes learning  
 learning about individual learner  
 pushing upper limits of ZPD  
 authentic audiences, real-live situations  
 dealing w/ colleagues  
 looking at own practice  
 group discussions  
 time and/or depth  
 focusing on D, J, B
  - \* 12/2/93 individuality of learners  
 authenticity  
 finished products  
 portfolios  
 VA - ASCD conference
  - 12/8/93 your reading group in Andrea's class
  - 12/9/93 adapting to meet social, emotional needs too  
 standards & expectations a la Grant Wiggins  
 journal  
 administration  
 authenticity
  - \* 12/10/93 integrating personal and professional  
 reading group/ authenticity  
 standards  
 journal  
 administration

Tony:

- consent form signed by Mom
- 5/11/93
- consent form signed by Dad
- 9/1/93
- letter about book Be Perfect...

9/24/93

quick wds from 4th grade	92-93
<u>Explode the Code #1</u> 4th grade	92-93
<u>Explode the Code #1 1/2</u> 4th grade	92-93
<u>Explode the Code #2</u> 4th grade	92-93
interest inventory	92-93
story (dictated draft, final copy)	92-93
responses to ques. about <u>Be Perfect...</u>	9/25/92
story (dictated draft, final copy)	10/9/92
ransom note	10/22/92
response to literature	11/10/92
answers to questions	92-93
goal to be better listener	92-93
letter (dictated draft, final copy)	92-93
preamble constitution	92-93
journal (class) 4th grade	92-93
<u>Tony's Dreams</u> (work with me)	spring 93
confidential report by psychologist	6/8/93
contents of cumulative folder	as of 9/93
scrambled message to me	5/5/93
how many Tony's=1 alligator	3/29/93
library card application	8/12/93
Wendy's placemat read to me	8/12/93
words/rhyming wds from journal	9/1/93
day in the hospital	9/1/93
words from <u>Horton Hatches the Egg</u>	9/2/93
card telling something about him	9/7/93
journal entries	9/7/93
cloze activity - done in group	9/7/93
words from <u>Six Chinese Brothers</u>	9/8/93
homework machine w/ S	9/8/93
book about him and friend Rony	9/9/93
my friend	9/9/93
patterns (thrown away)	9/13/93
poetry letter to parents (he signed)	9/13/93
cinquain	9/10/93
cinquain about school	9/13/93
spelling test	10/1/93
spelling test (one he cheated on)	10/7/93
math: properties (M)	10/7/93
spelling test	11/5/93
characterization	11/11/93
math: place value	11/16/93
math: place value/decimals (N)	11/18/93
math: place value/decimals (T)	11/19/93
self-assessment included	
math: daily cumulative review (M)	11/12/93
math quiz: place value/decimals (M)	11/16/93
alternative assessment report	10/13/93

story mapping 11/19/93  
 types of sentences (T) 11/22/93  
 detective notebook/mystery unit 11/29/93  
 literature group response sheets 11/28/93  
 math: regrouping w/ decimals 12/8/93

LL's reaction to paper  
 learning log: EQ's  
     pattern, poetry  
     patterns in math  
     prose  
     free verse  
     cinquain  
     list of nouns, adj, verbs  
     cinquain  
     butterfly - free verse  
     personification  
     poetry self-assessment  
     math patterns w/ calculator  
     symmetry  
     personification  
     logic  
     congruent figures  
     alliteration  
     narrative & lyric poetry  
     web for critter research  
     notes for critter research  
     onomatopoeia  
     refraction  
     attributes  
     nature in math and poetry  
     shadow prediction  
     shadow notes

fieldnotes/transcripts:

4th grade - 11/4/92  
     - class structure:  
         early bird special  
         computer for vocab/spelling drill  
         spelling rotation  
         reading groups  
         Tony

4th grade 2/10/93  
     - preparation for LPT  
     - hamburger for organizing paragraph  
     - LPT info  
     - preparation for IOWA - Test Best  
     - what about Tony on test day - disappear

- 4th grade - 2/17/93  
 - administration LPT  
 - deciding to spend more time in JD's room  
 - Tony
- 4th grade - 3/10/93  
 - Tony  
 - IOWA preparation
- conversation w/Tony 3/23/93  
 - learning to help w/ baby  
 - learning to talk  
 - knowing how to diaper, make formula, burp  
 - help from JD or friends  
 - learn from movies  
 - Luis  
 - helping another student  
 - human cannonball
- conversation w/ Tony 4/7/93  
 - encyclopedia from grocery  
 - figuring out how old books were  
 - talking about standardized tests  
 - understand why threw me out  
 - doing curl ups in PE  
 - why new kid skipped into 4th grade  
 - in Chapter One w/ E
- conversation w/ Tony 4/8/93  
 - alphabetical order worksheet  
 - self- assessment: only thing improving  
     is writing  
 - report cards/grades  
 - self-assessment: I can't write very good.
- conversation w/ Ms. Mitchell 4/19/93  
 - CS and psychologist about special ed.  
 procedure  
 - description Ms. Mitchell  
 - my conversation  
 - anxious for Tony to learn  
 - displeased w/ tutoring arrangement
- conversation w/ Tony 5/5/93  
 - two dimensional shapes  
 - Superman newspaper  
 - note to unscramble  
 - writing name on envelope

- putting wd in order of sentence
  - psychologist tested on shapes
  - " " on designs
  - writing family names on board
  - taking pictures of shapes
  - self-assessment:
- conversation w/ Tony 5/10/93
- self-assessment:
  - in my head it sounds easy, harder to do
- at Tony's house 5/11/93
- T comments about absences
  - comments about rubric, performance
  - conversation w/ CS cognitive coaching
  - controlling classroom (dif. b/t tchers)
  - stress of mandated tests @ 4th grade
  - description Mitchell house
  - talking about JD's class
  - division
  - Superman comic
  - conversation w/ Ms. Mitchell
  - relaying father's comments
  - go-cart cover - 9x12 tarp
- conversation w/ Tony 5/17/93
- self-assessment:
  - self-assessment:
  - parents:
  - reading test: comprehension questions
  - self-assessment:
- working w/ Tony 5/25/93
- conversation, reading to George
  - results of M's testing
- conversation w/parents 9/1/93
- description house, family
  - mother's response: keep back till learns
  - father's response: must consider social etc
  - my interactions/reactions
  - mother's questions about friends: neg.
  - consent form
- wk w/ Tony @ public library 9/1/93
- reaction to 4th grade wk
  - *Explode the Code*: helped a little  
some didn't make sense
  - self-correcting handwriting



- telling brother about Columbus
- Mom going back to school
- participation in classroom compared to others
  - \* I did the same thing but they put a little more into it I think.
  - \* I listened. If I didn't she'd have to start all over again. Sometimes I'd be able to listen. sometimes I'd be finishing that (*Explode the Code*)
- absences
- self-assessment:
- reaction to having to leave class
- self-assessment:
- writing story about taking Alex to hospital
- identifying Beethoven in book on composers
- testing my ability to read inventive spelling
- reading and punctuating story hospital

w/ Tony @ public library 9/2/93

- shoe shop sign
- *Horton Hatches the Egg*/running record
- observations about my wk w/ Tony
- finishing story about Alex
- using wd regurgitate

5th grade classroom observations 9/7/93

- Mr. Mitchell bringing Tony to school
- immediate inclusion in community
- index card activity
- collateral, interrupt
- pattern of writing/erasing, writing/erasing
- reactions in journal about 1st day
- read and add punctuation to journal
- hesitates/doesn't share what he's written
- Roses are Red poem in journal
- S: Are you going to be in 2nd grade math bk  
Little brother in that book
- negotiating role w/in group on garden
- cloze activity based on Voirst poem

wk after school w/ me 9/7/93

- *Six Chinese Brothers*/running record
- organizing stuff, calendar & assignment pad
- relating to collateral

5th grade classroom observations 9/8/93

- comments from BH and LL about Tony
- homework machine
- wk w/ S

- essential questions for poetry
- 5th grade classroom observation 9/13/93
  - *Important Book* - imp thing about friend
  - cinquain
  - group wk on patterns
  - number patterns in learning log
  - cinquain: parts of speech
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/14/93
  - # patterns w/ calculator
  - BH shares JD's comments about Tony
  - BH says Tony bought *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
  - beat, rhyme, rhythm
  - free verse: doesn't have no rhyme
  - not worrying about spelling & handwriting
  - outside - list wds describing animal
  - collateral for taking poetry books home
- working w/ me after school 9/14/93
  - copying D's code for Mortal Kombat
  - newspaper: car ads
  - *Six Chinese Brothers*/ running record
  - butterfly: prose to free verse
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/16/93
  - using mira: lines of symmetry
  - personification: take a banana and....
  - personification of pencil (tcher initiated presented some difficulty)
  - dilemma of modeling
  - literature discussion groups
  - describing choices
  - shares *Roses are red* poem
  - Tony's our lover
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/20/93
  - congruency
  - alliteration: patterns in poetry
  - LL modeling
  - share poem w/ class or one other person
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/21/93
  - LL assessing poetry knowledge
  - self-assessment about poetry
  - onomatopoeia
  - B teaching Tony
  - scaffolding: creating web for critter report working w/ George

- 5th grade classroom observations 9/22/93
- wk w/ group on reflection/refraction
  - S [to Tony]: Do you want to read?  
[to me]: He can't read.
  - double entry learning log
  - attributes
  - problem w/ staying to wk w/ me on Wed.
  - dilemma know how much to push
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/23/93
- rewriting critter report
  - poachers
- 5th grade classroom observations 9/27/93
- wking w/ group on logic problems
  - how much to push/ resisting editing
  - my own questions/uncertainties
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/4/93
- Thurber dollars
  - linking science & poetry *Someone Eating Sun*
  - generating questions about sun, earth
  - graphic organizer
  - fluency w/ writing effecting ability to share  
what they know
  - tensions I feel in classrooms
  - not attending to classroom activity
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/6/93
- using parentheses
  - reflections on teaching B and E
  - Jordan news conference & vocab
  - journal reaction to Jordan's retirement
  - BH keeping track time on task
  - conversation w/ LL about being on task
  - *Frog and Toad are Friends/* running record
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/7/93
- # property test
  - computer to practice addition & subtraction
  - using Mike as resource
  - shadows (prediction, negotiating w/ group)
- eligibility meeting 10/13/93
- positioning of people
  - M as chair
  - order of speaking
  - L: fluency coming  
depends on other children

- part of community
  - 2nd grade materials on shelf
  - not a "problem" to be solved
  - my report reinforced what LL said
  - Ms. Mitchell late/ brought baby
  - J couched accuracy of test results b/c lack of previous schooling/testing
  - socio report not in Confidential file
  - L "felt defensive, not problem"
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/13/93
- Mike sharing encyclopedia art. w/me
  - diversion? different style? interests?
  - LL getting Mike back on task
  - # patterns w/ zero
  - science groups: deciding what/how to present
  - conversation w/ Mike about presentation
- wk w/ Tony after school 10/13/93
- using computer to write texts for pictures
  - organizing thoughts into sentences
  - relying on environment/ previous written wds to help w/ spelling
  - problem solving display of pictures & text
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/14/93
- 0 in multiplication (3x10, 3x100, 3x1000)
  - told me how but didn't write in larning log happens frequently
  - LL: defensive in eligibility mtg at implication there was a problem to fix
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/25/93
- absent for wk/ no explanation
  - JD visits/ focus on her students as problems, low ability, need structure
  - blaming the student
  - LL rounding (using newspaper) - math group
  - wking with Eric, Bruce/ copying their answers
  - wking with LL: scaffolding
  - doesn't writing ability get in the way
  - LL asks D not to pull him out
  - mystery unit
  - wking in groups to classify mystery story wds
- wk w/ Tony after school 10/27/93
- reading from his library book
  - filling out order form for ring

- unfamiliarity w/ conventions of school
  - how is his expanding literacy changing relationships w/in family?
- 5th grade classroom observations 10/28/93
- JD's frustration
  - prediction about egg in bottle experiment
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/1/93
- election
  - Tony inattentive in whole and small group
  - M brings D, J, Tony into discussion
  - election vocabulary/ asking M tough ques.
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/4/93
- explanation of selection for portfolio (8 required, 1 poem, letter, table cont.)
  - wking w/ math group on place value
- side-by-side w/ B, E & Tony 11/5/93
- what I learned about strengths, understanding
  - how I could support learning of each
  - learning from the kind of mistakes they made
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/9/93
- rounding/ observing & documenting
  - vocabulary: abate & cower
  - characterization: mystery unit
  - Tony's summary of bk
- 5th grade classroom observations 11/11/93
- relationship between rounding & estimating
  - goals:
    - \* Tony: get a trophy, win a tournament, earn white belt, get married
    - \* Mike: lift water w/o touching it  
make helium
- conversation w/ LL 11/12/93
- Mike: math & writing through science
  - Tony: needed to participate a reader and writer report on vampire bat
- home journal entries
- fun vacation 9/20/93
  - patrol belt 9/21/93
  - new jeans and shirts 9/22/93
  - self-assessment: doing good in school

response from LL: great kid	9/28/93
today tcher gave lots of homework	9/27/93
fishing w/ brother and uncle	9/28/93
measuring group	9/29/93
didn't feel good	10/6/93
response from BH	
got a computer	10/12/93
new student	10/13/93
response from BH	
what he has learn in kungfu	10/28/93
response from LL	
new steps in kungfu	11/2/93
response from LL	11/4/93
what he has learned in kungfu	11/4/93
more about kungfu	11/8/93
beeper & 4 wheeler for Christmas	11/9/93
response from LL	
got kungfu outfit	11/15/93
	11/16/93
used cursive for several wds/teaching self	11/17/93
puppies next door	11/22/93
almost all cursive	11/29/93
went to the mall	12/3/93
good days in school	12/4/93
response from BH	12/7/93
self assessment:	12/7/93
response from BH	12/9/93
I like school is nice	12/13/93
response from LL	12/13/93
poem for LL and BH	12/14/93

## APPENDIX C

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade 4 School: \_\_\_\_\_ BD 4/19/81 C.A. 12-0

Test Date 5/5/93, 6/2/93 Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

WPPSI, WISC-III, WAIS-R

V.I.Q.	<u>76</u>	Band <u>71-83</u>	%ile <u>5</u>
P.I.Q.	<u>77</u>	Band <u>71-87</u>	%ile <u>6</u>
F.S.I.Q.	<u>75</u>	Band <u>70-87</u>	%ile <u>5</u>
Info	<u>5</u>	Pic. Com. <u>7</u>	V.C. Index <u>79</u>
Sim.	<u>7</u>	Coding <u>3</u>	P.O. Index <u>83</u>
Arit.	<u>5</u>	Pic. Arr. <u>8</u>	F.F.D. Index <u>78</u>
Vocab.	<u>5</u>	ED <u>4</u>	Pr. Sp. Index <u>58</u>
Comp.	<u>7</u>	OA <u>9</u>	
Digit Span	<u>7</u>	Syn. S. <u>1</u>	

Kaufman Test of Achievement (B-F or C-F)

	S.S.	%ile	A.E.	C.E.
Math	<u>65</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>8-0</u>	<u>2.6</u>
Reading	<u>58</u>	<u>1.3</u>	<u>6-3</u>	<u>1.3</u>
Spelling	<u>62</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6-9</u>	<u>1.6</u>
Total	<u>61</u>	<u>.5</u>	<u>7-0</u>	<u>1.8</u>
Math Ap.	<u>70</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>8-0</u>	<u>2.5</u>
Read. D.	<u>60</u>	<u>.4</u>	<u>6-3</u>	<u>1.4</u>
Read. C.	<u>62</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6-0</u>	<u>1.2</u>
Math Com.	<u>64</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>8-0</u>	<u>2.8</u>

Kaufman Asses. Battery for Children

Mean = 100, S.D. = 15

Sequential Proc.	_____	S.S.	_____	%ile	_____
Simultaneous Proc.	_____	S.S.	_____	%ile	_____
Mental Proc. Comp.	_____	S.S.	_____	%ile	_____
Achievement	_____	S.S.	_____	%ile	_____
Nonverbal	_____	S.S.	_____	%ile	_____

Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised

	G.S.	S.S.	%ile
Reading	_____	_____	_____
Spelling	_____	_____	_____
Math	_____	_____	_____

Morrison McCall Spelling

Grade Equivalent \_\_\_\_\_

Stanford Binet; 4th Edition, Form L-M

	Stand. Age Score	%ile
Verbal Reasoning	_____	_____
Abstract Reasoning	_____	_____
Quantitative Reasoning	_____	_____
Short-Term Memory	_____	_____
Test Composite	_____	_____

OTHER:

TEST OF NONVERBAL INTELLIGENCE  
TOTAL QUOTIENT = 77, 4th Ed.  
BEHAVIOR EVAL. SCALE = 2

Matrix Analogies

SS \_\_\_\_\_ %ile \_\_\_\_\_ Age Equiv. \_\_\_\_\_

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised

Age Equiv. 8-11 S.S. 78 %ile 7

Columbia Mental Maturity Scale (CMMS)

Age Dev. Score \_\_\_\_\_ %ile \_\_\_\_\_ Stanine \_\_\_\_\_  
 Maturity Index \_\_\_\_\_

Bender Gestalt

Errors (Koppitz) 8 Percept. Age. 6-0-6-5

Developmental Test of Visual Motor Inegration(VMI)

Perceptual Age \_\_\_\_\_ SS. \_\_\_\_\_ %ile \_\_\_\_\_

Visual Aural Digit Span Test

Test Age 10 to 11

Significant Areas ↓ RE, VI, OE, WE, I, T, T, R. SENSORY INTEGRATION.

**SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**PSYCHOLOGIST'S REPORT**

**DATE: June 8, 1993**

**NAME** Tony Mitchell

**SCHOOL** Thurber **GRADE** 4 **BIRTHDATE** 4/19/81

**TESTING DATE** May 5, 1993  
June 2, 1993

**REASON FOR REFERRAL**

Tony was referred for fullformal assessment at the request of his classroom teacher. She expresses concern regarding Tony's difficulties with learning.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Tony is a twelve year old fourth grader at Thurber Intermediate School. He was placed in that grade upon entering Thurber in February of 1992. He was W9 on March 5th of 1992. Tony again entered Thurber in the Fall of this school year and was again placed in the fourth grade. Tony has not attended any school prior to enrolling at Thurber. Despite his late start, Tony's record indicates excessive absences and frequent tardies and early checkouts.

Tony is described by his classroom teacher as cooperative, responsible and obedient. He has difficulty in all academic areas but math is viewed as a relative strength. He maintains good adult and peer interactions and his oral communication skills are viewed as good. He currently receives tutoring.

**TECHNIQUES UTILIZED**

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - 3rd edition  
Test of Nonverbal Intelligence  
Bender Gestalt  
Visual Aural Digit Span Test  
House-Tree-Person  
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised  
Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement  
Behavior Evaluation Scale -2



## RESULTS AND IMPRESSIONS

Tony was polite and courteous during both sessions of this evaluation. He appeared initially quite nervous about his change in his daily routine. With time and familiarity, he was observably more at ease. His tendency to respond quickly and to giggle decreased as he performed test items successfully. Tony related that he "really can't read" and that he learned his numbers "out of books with Mom."

Cognitively, Tony appears to be functioning within the borderline range of overall ability according to the WISC-III. His Full Scale IQ [intelligence quotient] of 75 reflects the 5th percentile by normative comparison. Both his Verbal and Performance IQs reflect borderline functioning as well. His Verbal IQ of 76 relies on language processing and to some degree exposure to and retention of factual material. Tony's lack of exposure to same may have affected this estimate. Tony's Performance IQ of 77 which also indicates borderline processing, is a nonverbal reasoning estimate. Among the individual subtest of the Performance scale, Tony demonstrates a relative strength in simple puzzle assembly and a relative weakness in processing speed. According to this assessment Tony demonstrates a mental age of approximately 9 years.

Another measure of intelligence was administered. The TONI is a language free measure of mental ability. The TONI relies on nonverbal problem solving skill. Problem solving is seen as a general component of intelligence as opposed to a subskill. Tony's responses earned him a TONI quotient of 74, which reflects the 4th percentile and the borderline range. This estimate is quite consistent with the scores of the WISC-III.

Tony's responses to the PPVT-R suggest receptive language skills in the borderline range. His standard score of 78 reflects the 7th percentile by normative comparison. This indicates an understanding of the spoken world at an 8 year 11 month level. Tony could not identify pictures representing words such as: triplet, tropical, bugle, easel, wedge, fragment, and composer.

Tony's visual motor skills reflect the 6-0 to 6-5 year range. His 8 scoreable errors (Koppitz) indicate difficulty with rotation of design part, distortion of angle and dot, and preservation of design. He also demonstrates difficulty with appropriate integration of design parts to form the whole figure. This performance reveals significant

perceptual motor delay. Tony's short term memory skills are at a 7-6 to 7-11 year range.

Tony's short term memory skills are at a 7-6 to 7-11 year range. According to age comparisons, Tony falls below the 10th percentile in his recall of visually and aurally presented information and in his ability to respond orally and in a written manner. He appears to be a bit more successful when information does not change sensory channel (for example, aural input - oral expression and visual input - written expression).

Educationally, Tony is performing at a late first grade level overall. Math appears to be his strongest area. He does math computation at a late 2nd grade level and math application at a mid 2nd grade level. On the application subtest, Tony did not use scratch paper despite being encouraged to do so. He occasionally missed a sign change on the computation sheet as well. He seems to have an adequate addition and subtraction foundation but demonstrates difficulty with regrouping for both operations. Tony's reading and spelling skills appear to be at a mid-first grade skill level. He appears restricted to letter identification and a limited sight word vocabulary. He appears somewhat successful with initial consonant sounds but has difficulty with vowel combinations and consonant clusters.

Tony's classroom teacher, Ms. Samuelson, completed the Behavior Evaluation Scale with reference to Tony's functioning at school. Her responses reveal that Tony is not a behavior problem and that her concerns center around his difficulty with schoolwork. Specifically, Tony is often off task and he seems excessive assistance from adults. His self esteem is also a concern. He often makes self-deprecating comments.

#### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Tony is a 12 year old fourth grade student at Thurber Intermediate School. He has had no formal education prior to enrolling in Thurber. This fact and excessive absences, tardies, and early checkouts suggest that education may not be a priority for this family. Cognitively, Tony is functioning within the borderline range of ability according to the WISC-III and TONI. Receptive language skills also reflect this range. Visual-motor and short term memory skills are also delayed in comparison to his agemate. At this, the conclusion of Tony's one year of formal education,

he is achieving at a first to second grade level.

At present, Tony does not demonstrate discrepancies which would suggest the presence of a specific learning disability. His lack of exposure to school material would make that diagnosis even more difficult as he has not had the opportunity to attempt to process the material along side his agemates. Tony will obviously need supplemental assistance to make academic gains. He needs to learn to read from the beginning, with basic phonetic rules being explained and practiced. Tutoring and any other resources available may be beneficial. Tony's and school staff's expectations need to be realistic to reduce frustration on all sides. Tony may further benefit from interaction with the school's guidance counselor regarding self-esteem issues and expectations. Summer school may also be a good opportunity for Tony to continue building on the acquisitions he has made this year.

## APPENDIX D

TO: Eligibility Committee  
Thurber Intermediate School  
Railtown City Schools

FROM: Pam Simpson  
PhD Candidate - Curriculum & Instruction  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA

RE: Additional information to be considered and  
included in Category II file of Tony Mitchell

DATE: October 12, 1993

### Questions Relating to Initial Assessment

The purpose of this, or any discussion of Tony's abilities and potentials, should be to define ways we, as parents, teachers, administrators, and interested others can best support and encourage his learning. If that is the case then crucial questions related to the psychological testing must be raised and critically addressed.

That a portion of the psychological evaluation was based on observations prompts two questions. Were observations conducted over an extended period of time and in a wide variety of situations? Were the observed activities analyzed and situated in the context of the lessons in which Tony and the class were engaged? The observations of Tony focused on a very limited amount of time and were confined to the instructional setting of his fourth grade class. Little attention was given to situating the observed behavior within the context. For example, Tony's observed inattention to a math lesson Ms. Samuelson's was teaching suggested an inability to focus or to concentrate on school work. No where was the context for this observation examined. No where did the observer note that Tony was not issued a fourth grade math book. Instead he was expected to work independently in a second grade text. Observational data collected did not acknowledge Tony's peripheral position within the classroom community of active readers and writers. Stacks of flashcards, phonetic worksheets, and Explode the Code books separated Tony from his peers and did little to support Tony's efforts to read and write. Rather than situating the observations within

this context, the focus became seeing what was "wrong" with Tony and how it might be "fixed."

Examining the list of seven tests used in Tony's psychological evaluation prompts an additional question. Were the tests designed to measure a broad sample of what Tony could do? Howard Gardner and his colleagues at Harvard's Project Zero make the point that the lack of attention to the everyday contexts of people's activities undermines the validity of test results. When we ignore how people perform in culturally meaningful settings, tests become simply measures of how well people take the kinds of tests given. Tests then:

are limited not only in the competencies they examine, but in the way they examine them. They require people to deal with atypical, decontextualized tasks, rather than probing how people function when they are able to draw upon their experience, feedback, and knowledge as they typically do. Unless assessment is placed in the context of authentic domains and social environments, we doubt it can adequately represent human intellectual performance. (Kornharber, Krechevsky, & Gardner, 1990, p. 188-189)

The tests used to evaluate Tony sample only a narrow and limited domain of skills. They do not sample authentic activities or measure skills in real-world tasks. And so we are asked to describe a boy who has mastered the complexities of Super Nintendo and Genesis II as having poor visual motor skills because his scorable errors (Koppitz) indicate difficulty rotating and integrating design part, distortion of angle and dot. We are asked to describe a boy who uses words like regurgitate and dignity appropriately has borderline receptive language skills because he cannot identify pictures representing triplet, tropical, wedge and fragment. This is not the Tony I have seen. Nor is it the picture of his strengths and abilities I hope will be incorporated into his educational history.

#### Authentic Assessment of Tony's Literacy Development

My aim in this memo is to introduce a counter story, an alternative if you will, to the reductive, clinical description of Tony's abilities presented in the psychological report. To accomplish this goal I will: 1) briefly explain the methods used for collecting data; 2) provide detailed evidence of Tony's strengths, interests, and potentials; and, 3) offer specific suggestions to

support and encourage Tony's continuing educational growth.

My work with Tony began in October, 1992. Drawing on Denny Taylor's (1990) idea of "personal literacy configurations," I began constructing a "thick description" (Taylor, 1990) of Tony based on multiple sources of information. As a participant observer I have moved with Tony from fourth grade to fifth, from the classroom to the playground or lunchroom, and from school to home. I have worked "side-by-side" (Atwell, 1983; Taylor, 1990) with Tony as he completes class assignments, talks about family and friends, and creates narratives linking his "in-school" world with his "out-of-school" experiences. Many of these occasions have been audio taped and transcribed. All have been recorded in fieldnotes written during or as soon as possible following the events observed. I have talked with individuals who interact with Tony at school (teachers, aides, volunteers) as well as family members to broaden my understanding of Tony's "literacy configuration." I have collected and analyzed Tony's work (e.g journal entries, class assignments, notes to friends, tapes, and group projects) over an extended period of time. Finally, I have conducted a reading inventory and running record (Johnston, 1991) to document Tony's reading ability.

The following observations are based on my analysis of the data collected:

- \* **Storytelling** - Tony's ability to organize his thoughts and tell an engaging story is evident throughout my fieldnotes. Attachment #1 is an example of a story Tony wrote prior to the beginning of a school this year. In it he: 1) relates the events sequentially, 2) uses acceptable sentence structure (i.e. subject, verb, prepositional phrase), 3) demonstrates an understanding of subject-verb agreement (i.e. we stood, he woke, we ran), 4) demonstrates an understanding of verb tense (The event happened in the past and all of the verbs used were in the past tense), 5) uses spacing and punctuation to indicate where one sentence ends and another begins, 6) has an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds (He uses inventive spelling that closely approximates the standard spelling of the word and is consistent with the phonetic pronunciation of the word - hosptl for hospital), and 7) uses interesting and unusual words accurately and appropriately in

describing what happened in the story (He commented that he did not want to use the words throw up. I suggested vomit as an alternative. He said no there was an r word he wanted to use. He thought for a moment then wrote regrgotet).

- \* **Persistence and Creativity in Problem Solving -**  
One morning last spring Tony brought a encyclopedia he'd purchase at the grocery to school. His favorite pages were the pictures of flags. Using the encyclopedia and a book from the school library Tony identified all of the flags hanging in the school. Initially he located the flag in the book and I wrote the country's name in his journal. His interest in this activity persisted and he continued to record the names of the countries on his own (Attachment #2). In the process of identifying the flags he found two that were upside-down. He informed the office so Mr. [ ] could take those flags down and rehang them in the correct manner.
  
- \* **Ability to Read Print in the Environment -**  
Repeatedly Tony has noticed and read print in his environment. As we drive he is able to read [ ] Rd., [ ] Rd., Radio Shack and numerous other signs. When we approached the branch of the Railtown Library on [ ] Rd. Tony was able to use contextual clues and read the sign on the entrance door. Tony is also able to appropriately reproduce and use words from his immediate environment in practical situations. Attachment #3 shows how, working independently, Tony completed the form requesting a library card.
  
- \* **Contributions to Class Discussions -** Tony does not hesitate to participate in class discussions. His comments and questions are most often pertinent and substantive. Further they reveal insights and understandings beyond what might be typically expected of a fifth grader. Last winter as his classmates struggled to understand how Colonel Knox got the canons up and down the Berkshire Mountains, Tony was able to clearly and accurately explain the intricate system of pulleys, levers, and wedges described in the book. On the first day of school when his teacher was introducing the word collateral Tony said it had to do with loaning (fieldnotes 9/7). Later that same day he

shared this:

When she (Ms. Mcmann) was talking about collateral today. I was just thinking. When me and my dad goes to buy a car the bank gets to give you a loan. It's like when you're at the car dealer and the car's a little too much money so you ask the bank to give you a loan. You put up a little balance and the bank will put up the rest. (fieldnotes, 9/7)

A week later when students wanted to borrow Ms. Mcmann's books over night, Tony suggested she ask for collateral (fieldnotes 9/14).

- \* **Uses Reading to Gain Information** - Tony reads to gain information about people and things that interest him. His collection of Superman comics provide a wealth of information about the superhero and the many imitators emerging after Superman's death. Recently Tony spent hours copying a sheet of complex commands related to a new battle game, Mortal Combat, he'd ordered from Radio Shack (fieldnotes, 9/14). He also read the classified section of the newspaper to find a listing for his favorite car (Attachment #4, section of fieldnotes 9/14/93). Tony not only knows where to look for car ads but also how to interpret the abbreviations for various options and how to read the price.
- \* **Uses Reading and Writing in Instrumental Way to Organize or Manage his Everyday Life** - Tony uses print to organize his everyday life. He puts the date and time on every journal and learning log entry. He has a calendar in his notebook on which he writes important events and an assignment pad where he records his spelling words and other homework.
- \* **Writes Creatively for Self-expression** - Tony's fifth grade teacher has provided numerous opportunities for students to express their feelings and emotions in writing. In his first journal entry Tony talks about being nervous and unable to sleep the night before the first day of school. A later entry explained the sadness Tony feels when basketball player Michael Jordan announced his retirement (Attachment #5). As part



of a poetry unit Tony has been able to express his feelings in cinquain and free verse (Attachment #6).

- \* **Interacts with Other Students to Accomplish Teacher Initiated Tasks** Tony works well with other students. He normally participates actively in the group interaction and contributes to the over completion of the task. He sometimes takes responsibility for keeping everyone in the group on task. Attachment #7 is a homework machine invented, designed and described by Steve and Tony.
  
- \* **Constructs and Uses Written Language - Examples** from Tony's learning log and journal illustrate his ability to construct and use written language. Attachment #8 is a paragraph written following an activity about shadows. His paragraph: 1) organizes the events sequentially, 2) uses words and phrases to indicate order (then, when) and the passage of time (every two hours), 3) has a main idea sentence, and 4) separates thoughts into sentences. Attachment #9 is a poem written following research on tigers. In both cases Tony began with a graphic organizer, took notes, wrote a rough draft, edited and revised with a teacher or peer, and produced a final draft.
  
- \* **Running Record of Reading -** On Wednesday 10/6/93 I worked with Tony during the sustained silent reading time. He read four pages from the chapter *Cookies* chapter in Frog and Toad. I made several observations about his reading: 1) He was able to correct most of his miscues himself without prompting or clues; 2) In a couple of places he does not read the text exactly as it is written but his errors do not disturb the meaning of the sentence (i.e. he said home instead of house); and, 3) When working out the sentence "He ate one." Tony realized what he read "He are one." did not make sense. He is becoming more fluent. As he does so, clarity becomes a bigger issue. I asked him to put the words from the sentence "And they taste even better," he said. together into a sentence so they would make sense. The notes describe how he worked out two variations that made sense and one that didn't. The variation "And he said, they taste even better" pointed out

a willingness to play with words. That variation does not follow the traditional/ predictable patterns. He combined the words in a creative way that still made sense in the context of the story. Attachment # 10 is the running record of his reading. It indicates his continued improvement in reading ability.

### Recommendations

The following are recommendations I believe will encourage and support Tony's sustained effort and growth. Tony would benefit from classroom environments in which:

\* Teachers have an expansive definition of literacy and are committed to creating *authentic, meaningful literacy experiences*. Such experiences should provide opportunities for Tony to build upon and expand the types and uses of literacy already a part of his everyday life. Specifically this would mean: 1) drawing heavily on Tony's interests in video games and graphics, cars, basketball, and superheroes; 2) offering opportunities for *Tony* to: choose topics about which he'd like to read, research, and write and define the way(s) he would like to exhibit what he has learned; and 3) providing *real world* reasons for Tony to read and write as well as *authentic* audiences for his work.

\* Teachers create opportunities for him to use literacy as a means of self-expression and personal identity, to meet the practical needs of his everyday life, to build and maintain social relationships, to become a life-long learner and a responsible member of society.

\* Engage him as a participant in communities of active readers and writers and offer many, varied opportunities for collaboration with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community as well as interaction with a wide range of technological resources. Specifically Tony should have opportunities to: 1) read to younger students; 2) interview older citizens to learn more about the community in which he lives; and 3) use the word processing, graphics, and communication capabilities of computers to enhance his literacy configuration and expand the network of people with whom he interacts.

## VITA

**PAMELA J. SIMPSON**  
4126 Pearman Road  
Blacksburg, VA 24060

### EDUCATION

Doctoral Candidate                      Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA  
  
Chair:                                      Dr. Jan K. Nesor  
Dissertation:                              Contextualizing Assessments of Literate Learning: Can Tony Read and Write?  
  
M.Ed., 1988                                University of South Carolina  
B.S.Ed., 1969                               Otterbein College

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

#### Teaching

1993 - 1994 academic year  
Virginia Tech: EDCI 4204 -              Assessment in Reading and Writing Instruction  
Responsibilities:                      Developed course syllabus and implement 10-week overview of assessment practices in elementary classrooms. Course focused on performance assessments, development of biographic literacy profiles, observation, and documentation.  
  
August 1993, August 1992  
Virginia Tech: GTA Training Workshop  
Responsibilities:                      Conducted a segment of university-wide Graduate Teaching Assistant Training workshop. Videotaped and critiqued performance in micro-teaching episodes.  
  
1992 - 1993 academic year  
Virginia Tech: Professional Seminar  
Montgomery County Student Teaching Model  
Responsibilities:                      Planned and facilitated weekly Professional Seminar for student teachers. Emphasis centered on inquiry, reflection and relationship between theory to practice.

August 1989 - November 1990

Aiken Preparatory: Science coordinator, teacher

Responsibilities: Coordinated planning and implementation of a hands-on Science program K - 8. Taught fifth grade general science and two sections of sixth grade earth science. Program incorporated hands-on experiences extensive use of literature and authentic student research.

August 1986 - June 1989

Aiken County Public Schools: Teacher, gifted and talented

Responsibilities: Identified students for placement in the program based on state guidelines. Coordinated program involving two full-time teachers and 150 students in grades 3 - 5. Developed and implemented differentiated programs to meet the needs of students identified as gifted and talented and to support efforts of classroom teachers to offer enrichment opportunities for all students.

August 1982 - June 1986:

Aiken County Schools, Aiken SC

Responsibilities: second, fourth and fifth grades.

August 1974 - June 1976:

Plain Local Schools, New Albany, OH

Responsibilities: first grade

August 1973 - June 1974:

Robins Air Force Base Schools, Robins AFB GA

Responsibilities: fourth and fifth grade math

August 1972 - June 1973:

Winton Woods Public Schools, Cincinnati OH

Responsibilities: second grade

February 1970 - June 1972:

Capital School District, Dover, Delaware

Responsibilities: second grade

August 1969 - June 1970:

Wood County Schools, Bowling Green, OH

Responsibilities: fifth grade

## **Supervision**

August 1991 - May 1993

Virginia Tech: supervisor of elementary student teachers, Montgomery County Model Division of Curriculum & Instruction

Responsibilities: Observed student teachers' performance in public school classrooms. Discussed with students curriculum, instruction, assessment, and classroom management.

## **Additional Professional Development**

- June 1994 Literacy Exchange, University of Arizona. Worked with Dr. Denny Taylor and the graduate students from the Department of Language, Reading, and Culture to study the complex ways literacy is used in communities in Tucson, Arizona.
- August 1993 Literacy Exchange, University of New Hampshire. Worked with Dr. Denny Taylor, teachers, and graduate students to explore the ways in which literacy is embedded in the everyday lives of individuals and families in a community
- July 1993 Integrating Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. Week-long workshop focusing on student outcomes, essential questions, and performance assessments. Conducted by Connie Manter of the Maine Department of Education.
- March 1990 Great Expectations in Math and Science (GEMS) Leadership Training - Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley
- August 1989 Junior Great Books Training
- July 1989 Activities Integrating Math and Science (AIMS) Training
- June 1988 The Enrichment Triad/Revolving Door Model: A Schoolwide Plan for Development of Creative Productivity. Conducted by Dr. Joseph Renzulli and Dr. Sally Reis, University of Connecticut.

## SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

### State, Regional, and National Presentations

Simpson, P. (1994, November). *I just can't read so good: Students' self-assessments and teachers' beliefs*. Proposal accepted for presentation at the National Reading Conference in San Diego.

Simpson, P., C. Smith, M. Norman, L. LeFever, E. Johnson. (1994, April). *Portfolio potential: students and teachers reflect on the learning*. Panel presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Portfolio Series, Portfolios for Learning and Beyond: Portfolios, Reflection and Teacher Research, Baltimore, Maryland.

Simpson, P. (1994, April). *Of carnivals and schools: learning in communities of practice*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Nespor, J. & P. Simpson. (1994, April). *Getting rid of grading in an urban elementary school*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Nespor, J., L. Barber, & P. Simpson. (October, 1993). *Projects in space and time*. Paper presented at the Bergamo Conference, Dayton, Ohio.

Barber, L. & P. Simpson (October, 1993). *Portfolios: potential for change*. Panel discussion at Annual Meeting, Virginia Association of Teachers of English, Roanoke, VA.

Simpson, P. (1993, February). *Transforming assessment: Teachers and the process of change*. Paper presented at the Ethnography in Education Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

### District and Local Presentations

Simpson, P. (March, 1994). *Alternative assessment: An overview*. Presentation for students enrolled in the Masters program in Rockbridge County Virginia under the auspices of the Division of Curriculum and Instruction,

College of Education, Virginia Tech. The presentation focused on forms of authentic assessment including portfolios, literacy profiles, performances, and exhibitions. Strategies for assessing and documenting using rubrics, anecdotal records, and observational checklists were introduced.

Simpson, P. (June, 1993). *Assessment strategies in the whole language classroom*. Presentation on assessment issues related to authentic learning, thematic teaching, and the whole language philosophy at a three-day seminar sponsored by the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Virginia Tech.

Simpson, P. (1992, May). *Problem solving in the classroom: Opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking*. Seminar presented for the Montgomery County Student Teaching Model, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg VA.

Simpson, P. (1989, February). *Applying for teaching grants: Possibilities and pitfalls*. Seminar for elementary teachers, Aiken County, Aiken, SC.

Simpson, P. (1988, September). *Tapping potential: Differentiated curriculum for the gifted in Aiken County*. Presentation to the PTA, Aiken Elementary, Aiken, SC.

Simpson, P. (1987, August). *Applying for grants: Administrators' role in supporting teachers' initiatives*. Presentation for the administrators Aiken County Public Schools, Aiken, SC.

Simpson, P. (1986, October). *Education Improvement Act: Its impact on classroom teachers*. Presentation to Governor Richard Riley's Education Forum, Aiken, SC.

#### **SERVICE**

January 1993 - September 1993  
President, Association of Curriculum and  
Instruction Graduate Students

January 1993 - September 1993  
Chair, Graduate Student Assembly Regranting Budget  
Board

October 1992 - May, 1993:

Search Committee, Vice-Provost for Research & Dean  
of the Graduate School

August 1991 - September 1993

Representative, Graduate Student Assembly

#### AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- 1993 Nominated to Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
- 1991-94 Instructional Fee Scholarships, College of  
Education, Division of Curriculum and Instruction,  
Virginia Tech
- 1990 Project EARTH - Awarded Outstanding Contribution  
to Education by the South Carolina Association for  
Supervision and Curriculum Development
- 1990 Runner-up Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Program,  
proposal commended for excellence by selection  
panel
- 1989 Awarded and implemented \$2000 South Carolina  
Education Improvement Act Grant - Project EARTH
- 1989 Aiken County Teacher Incentive Award recipient
- 1987 Awarded and implemented \$2000 South Carolina  
Education Improvement Act Grant - Project LITE
- 1987 Aiken County Teacher Incentive Award recipient
- 1987 Project WORDS - Awarded Outstanding Contribution  
to Education by South Carolina Association for  
Supervision and Curriculum Development
- 1986 Awarded and implemented \$2000 South Carolina  
Education Improvement Act Grant - Project WORDS
- 1985 Awarded and implemented \$2000 South Carolina  
Education Improvement Act Grant - Using Math  
Manipulatives



**PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

National Council Teachers of Mathematics  
National Science Teachers Association  
National Reading Council  
American Educational Research Association  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Virginia Association of Teachers of English

*Pamela J. Simpson*