SUPPORTING THE STUDENT WRITER: 
THE ROLE OF TEACHER TALK DURING *KID WRITING WORKSHOP*

A Thesis in 
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by 
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to observe and describe one teacher’s use of language with her second-grade students during Kid Writing: a writing workshop curriculum. The researcher was interested in discovering the impact of the teacher’s language with her students in learning to write. In a sociocultural perspective, learning is both social and contextual, and language is vital to constructing meaning within social interactions. The goal of this study was not to evaluate the Kid Writing program or to generalize the findings, but to inform other teachers about the role of language during writing instruction.

A microethnographic research design was used to observe and record the details of the interactions during Kid Writing workshop. The researcher utilized ethnographic techniques of prolonged behavioral observations as well as becoming a participant observer during Kid Writing workshop. The researcher also utilized socio-linguistic techniques to analyze language and discursive practices of the behavior observed. As a microethnographic study, the researcher was particularly attentive to the discursive practices, specifically language use during writing instruction.

Data were analyzed utilizing discourse analysis methods which realized the interconnectedness of text, discourse, and context. First, the writing conversation data were analyzed by following the linguistic and thematic patterns in the language. Second, by utilizing intertextual analysis, these data findings were compared to the data collected from observations and interviews with the students, parents, and teacher. Analyses of these data provided the researcher with the thematic content of the conferences between
the teacher and the students, the linguistic structure of the interaction, and the
extralinguistic forms utilized during instruction.

*Kid Writing*, as a curriculum, was situated within the pedagogical framework of
writing workshop. Writing workshop was defined and described using four models:
expressionist, socio-linguistic, psycho-linguistic, and critical. The role of language by
teacher and students in each model was explained. Then the *Kid Writing* curriculum was
analyzed and positioned within these workshop models, particularly within the psycho-
linguistic model.

The findings revealed that the teacher used her language to build relationships
within the community of *Kid Writing* workshop. Through her language and discursive
practices, she established positive rapport with students by learning about them, by
thinking out loud with them, and by conversing with them. Her language use also
revealed the importance of establishing the meaning of the text and co-constructing
knowledge during conference interactions. The findings revealed that this teacher used
her expert discursive practices to provide a means for students to learn the language and
skills necessary for school discourse.

The findings also revealed that the teacher pulled her students along the learning
continuum to grow as writers. Through her language use the teacher noticed and named
the actions and content of the text so that students could claim identities as writers. Her
instructional language included utilizing questions and conditional phrases to reveal
knowledge to the students as well as utilizing specific strategies to explicitly tell students
information so that they could become self-sufficient writers. During *Kid Writing*
workshop the teacher pulled her students along to become productive writers.
This study provides teachers with an example of how to use language and discursive practices to assist students to grow as writers. This study also situates the Kid Writing curriculum within a sociocultural perspective of learning. This study contributes to the body of knowledge about writing instruction by revealing the importance of using language both to build relationships with students and to support them as writers. At a time when public education is very content-driven, this study emphasizes the importance of the teacher as she utilizes her language to teach contextually to the needs of individual students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ix  
List of Tables x  
Acknowledgements xi  

Chapter 1: Introduction 1  
A Sociocultural Theoretical Framework of Learning 6  
Learning is Social 6  
Language is a Means of Learning 8  
Learning is Contextual 11  
The Role of the Teacher 13  
The Teacher’s Language and Learning 14  
Conclusion 15  

Chapter 2: The Roles of Language during Writing Workshop 17  
A Socio-linguistic View of Language Use in Instruction 19  
Language as a Social Activity 19  
The Teacher’s Language 20  
Writing Workshop and the Role of Language 23  
Models of Writing Workshop 26  
Expressionist Model 26  
Socio-linguistic Model 27  
Psycho-linguistic Model 28  
Critical Model 29  
Models Compared 30  
Writing Workshop in Ms. Newman’s Second-Grade Classroom 33  
*Kid Writing*: A Psycho-linguistic Curriculum of Writing Workshop 35  
A Balanced Literacy Approach 35  
A Social Process Approach 37  
A Psycho-linguistic Approach 38  
Conclusion 40  

Chapter 3: Methodology 43  
Site Description 44  
Research Design 47  
Data Collection 50  
Description of Data Analysis 54  
Validity and Bias 57  
Conclusion 59  

Chapter 4: Meet the Participants 61  
Meet Ms. Newman 61  
Ms. Newman’s Philosophy and Practices 63  
Ms. Newman’s Student-centered Practices 66
References 135

Appendix A: Timeline for Research Study and Data Collection 143

Appendix B: Initial Teacher Interview Questions 144

Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions 145

Appendix D: Second-Grade Student Interview Questions 146

Appendix E: *Kid Writing* Student Journal Sample 147

Appendix F: Photographs of Ms. Newman’s Classroom 149
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Tailyn’s Drawing 147
Figure 2: Tailyn’s kid writing and Ms. Newman’s adult writing 148
Figure 3: The Library Corner 149
Figure 4: The Word Wall 149
Figure 5: Math Vocabulary 150
## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Comparison of Writing Models and Teacher’s Language  
Table 2: An Overview of the Student Participants
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter I will share the beginnings of my research journey, especially in regards to my introduction to the Kid Writing curriculum. The intersection of my academic excursion and my professional training fostered the questions which gave birth to this dissertation study. I will also lay a sociocultural theoretical foundation for this research and relate it to the role that language plays in the school community. Finally, I will discuss how language and community impact learning. This chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the importance of language and community within a sociocultural framework of learning.

“Third graders! Today we are going to take our ocean creature research notes and turn them into paragraphs. Remember, each paragraph needs a topic sentence, at least three detail sentences, and a closing sentence. Each paragraph needs a minimum of five sentences.” I look around the room to see if everyone understands. I notice a puzzled look on Grace’s face. She raises her hand and says, “Mrs. Cook, I’ve read paragraphs with only three sentences in them.” I quickly retort, “I know, but today we are going to do it the research way - five sentences for each paragraph.” (Cook, 2006, p. 14)

These words were no sooner out of my mouth, when I realized, that after all my recent studies in sociocultural theory, Grace’s statement had finally challenged my classroom pedagogy. Had I fallen in the “trap” of teaching only content and form to my third graders? Had I forgotten the importance of cultural context for learning? Had I forgotten that literacy has many perspectives? Had I forgotten the importance of dialogue?

As a teacher I was facing a dilemma. On the one hand, the state and federal governments were adopting high-stakes testing legislation which meant that I needed to
teach writing in a very product-centered approach so that my students could pass a mandated test. In other words, there were specific forms of writing that I must teach to my students so that they would be able to succeed on these standardized tests. My students needed to know grammar rules and sentence structures before they could write other genres that involved extended texts or creative works. They needed to be taught the format of various genres of writing. This was in fact how I was taught in my undergraduate preservice teacher preparation. On the other hand, my own current philosophical understanding of how I should teach children was becoming very process-centered which meant that I should allow my students to write about their lived experiences and through the process of conferring I would teach the necessary grammar and sentence lessons. This quandary forced me to reflect upon my job responsibilities and how to best meet the needs of my employer and my conscience. I’m in favor of accountability and high standards; however, I believe that life and learning are about more than being able to pass a test.

Over the years I have pondered this tension and talked to other teachers to hear their views. This past year as I was working in Ms. Newman second-grade classroom, we talked about this writing curricular tension. She said,

I think what we’re going to have to do now is take all of this writing that they’ve [students] done and not just do things like adult writing [conventional writing] and talk about the mechanics and the grammar and things like that; but take a piece that they have written and have them analyze it and look at it critically and talk about the meaning of the piece… If they sat with a friend and each picked a favorite story or something, and then had a certain rubric to follow. So they begin to look at a story more critically which might help them. And because it’s a story that they are related to someway, whether it is a friend that’s an author or it’s their own piece, they begin to kind of analyze it a little bit more in the ways that we expect them to do in our curriculum. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 120)
Ms. Newman believed that talk among students and with the teacher was a solution to this curricular tension.

She also believed that each student was unique and would grow as a writer but in different ways. She stated, “as long as they can generate those ideas and as long as they’re productive then…their writing is going to grow. (Ms. Newman, interview, Feb 23, 2006, line 38). For example, until one of her second-graders, Carmen, “pictured herself as an author and really believed that she was a writer, she couldn’t move on. She couldn’t be productive.” (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 96). Also, Tailyn, another second-grader, “would write but in a limited sense so I would push her to [use] more descriptive words (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 98). With full awareness of the dual need for students to grow personally and to pass a standardized test, Ms. Newman utilized social interaction with her students to teach them how to write. She used writing conferences to interact with the students to teach them the grammar and mechanics of writing. At the same time she situated the students’ writing in the everyday context of their lives. She used writing conferences to balance her approach to the tensions between process and product writing.

During the 2003-04 school-year, the district where I was teaching had adopted a new writing program called Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) for use with kindergarten through second grade. This curriculum valued social interaction among students and with the teacher during writing instruction. Feldgus and Cardonick stated that learning occurred during social interaction and while attending to children’s individual needs and abilities. The school district wanted to align writing instruction in these primary grades to the state standards and to provide instructional continuity. I was
able to attend the training seminars for *Kid Writing* where I dialogued with teachers about writing instruction. Since this curriculum allowed the teachers much freedom in shaping and personalizing instruction, I began to think about the relationship between the teacher’s beliefs and understandings of writing instruction and the structure imposed by the *Kid Writing* curriculum. My passion for teaching and my leadership skills in writing instruction afforded me an opportunity to begin this dissertation research.

At the training seminar I was introduced to the *Kid Writing* philosophy of instruction. Feldgus and Cardonick (1999) emphasize that teaching and learning is founded on the relationship of social interaction rather than on the use of specific teaching materials. Their Vygotskian view of learning provides students many opportunities to approximate writing while working with more knowledgeable adults daily in writing workshop.

I also learned that the daily *Kid Writing* workshop follows a particular format. First, students are encouraged to draw and talk as they brainstorm ideas from their personal experiences about which to write. Next, they utilize their own knowledge of letter and sound connections to write their story in “kid writing” as well as relying on their peers and a print-rich environment for support. At this point, the teacher confers individually with each student adding “adult writing” while discussing the child’s story. At the end of the session, when selected children share their stories during whole-group time, the teacher conducts minilessons on phonics and writing skills. All aspects of the *Kid Writing* workshop rely on the power of social interactions to foster learning.

In the spring of 2004 I helped to implement the *Kid Writing* curriculum into the kindergarten classroom at the school where I taught third grade. I taught small group
journal writing within a writing workshop format two times a week for four months in the kindergarten class. As I modeled the curriculum and coached adults to work with children, I realized that the interaction between students and teacher was instrumental in guiding instruction. I decided to observe these students for several years as a basis for this study to begin to understand the role of the teacher’s language in writing workshop.

After working with these same students as they moved from kindergarten to first and then to second grade, I became interested in how Ms. Newman, the second-grade teacher, set the stage for writing to occur in the context of writing workshop. For this study I explored two areas of particular concern. (1) How does the teacher use language to build relationships within the community of writing workshop? (2) How does the teacher use language to provide social assistance during writing conference?

In working with Ms. Newman and her second graders, I realized that in order for the teacher to lead the students into “productive” writing experiences it was important for her to get to know the students and then to utilize her language to guide them forward to become writers in their own ways. As Ms. Newman stated,

> when we talked about the reluctant writer, for that child to put something down on the paper even though it might not be anything very complex. For them that is productive. For a child who is more comfortable writing who can write a story with a beginning, middle, and end for them to be productive would be to add more details. To think about character development and things like that. So productive is different for every child but in some way that they are building their writing skills. No matter where they are. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 84)

The findings from this study have revealed that both the teacher’s language and her discursive practices can influence and direct students during writing workshop. The *Kid Writing* curriculum afforded the teacher flexibility and choices while instructing students in writing so that her skill in using language well could help to guide the
students as writers. By observing this teacher I was able to notice not only her language use but also her philosophical influences on her discursive practices.

Before I share the story of the language of the teacher during writing instruction, I need to set the stage with a theoretical framework. The remainder of this chapter defines a sociocultural framework and the role of teacher language within the school community focused by the question: How does language and community impact learning?

A Sociocultural Theoretical Framework of Learning

I feel that it is important to consider the sociocultural context of learning. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) define “sociocultural” as being “heavily focused on the impact of culturally organized and socially enacted meanings on the formation and functioning of mental activity” (p. 2). As the word “sociocultural” indicates, this theoretical framework considers the importance of both the social and cultural aspects of the learning situation when determining meaning construction. Knowledge is not constructed in isolation but in context to the practices, language, and culture of the learning situation. Sociocultural theoretical outlook focuses on the social process and interactions which use signs and tools as vehicles for constructing knowledge. Sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is social, contextual, and that meaning is derived through language use within the social interaction.

Learning is Social

Vygotsky (1978) stated that “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological features”
Vygotsky (1978) placed learning in a social context. In fact, he wrote that learning is optimized in a social situation. What a child can learn independently is his actual mental level, but with the help of peers or adults to assist in solving a problem, the child is able to increase his learning. This increased learning is the potential mental level of the child. Vygotsky believed that by utilizing the distance between the child’s actual independent learning level and his or her potential learning level, teachers could enhance student learning. He called the difference between these two levels of learning the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). Through social interaction with the teacher, children are capable of learning more than they could by themselves.

Through social interaction with experts, children are able to stretch their learning. Although the focus is on second language learners, Lantolf and Thorne’s (2006) explanation of sociocultural theory is insightful: “[C]ognitive development results from social and inter-personal activity becoming the foundation for the intra-personal functioning” (p. 266). When a child has internalized learning, he is able to perform complex cognitive and motor functions without assistance from the teacher. Vygotsky (1978) wrote that children grow into the intellectual level around them. It follows that teachers should utilize the ZPD so that children are pulled into the direction of developing beyond their independent actual mental level. Vygotsky’s formula for
learning stated, “[T]he only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (p. 89). In a sociocultural theoretical foundation learning is a social activity. Learning and mental development can be enhanced by interacting with a group.

**Language is a Means of Learning**

Language plays an important role as the vehicle through which meaning is constructed within these social interactions. An individual has an experience in a social context and expresses meaning through the use of language (Eagleton, 1996). Meaning is not a fixed entity to be grasped, but rather meaning is constructed during a social interaction. The ways of making meaning from experiences are “essentially intersubjective [that is,] socially constructed through symbolic interactions” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 135) so that meaning develops as the subjects interact with language. People use language to make meaning of their experiences.

There are various influences on experiences that provide meaning from language. According to Gee (1992), people make mental images about their past experiences and by interacting via language with those images, meaning is constructed. Prior knowledge builds cultural schema which is shared with people who have had the same experiences (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). In this way culture gives meaning to words (Bruner, 1990). Both personal and cultural experiences provide the resources for people to construct knowledge and make meaning with language.

If language is the means of constructing and transmitting knowledge, then talk is essential. Learning is a semiotic process involving gaining knowledge through language and about language (Halliday, 1993). Although it is through language that an individual
“learn[s] to mean, and to expand one’s meaning potential” (p. 113), it is imperative to remember that meaning resides in the interaction and not in the words themselves (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). A collaborative discussion enables people to achieve goals effectively and to construct knowledge together. This dialogic co-construction of meaning is the essence of education (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

Language is necessary to understanding other people’s perceptions as well as their experiences (Gee, 2004). People’s perceptions of the same experience can be different so language is a significant vehicle in which people can make their unique meaning known. Applying this to a school context, students not only share their own experiences, but also construct new ones and become members of a school community of learners (Cook-Gumperz, 1986).

Education, then, involves discussion or meaningful talk among students and with the teacher so that learning is defined, negotiated, and evaluated. Vygotsky (1986) states that there are two forms of learning: spontaneous and scientific. Spontaneous instruction is learning that is based on experiential activities, such as discovery learning. Whereas scientific instruction is learning that is based on explicit instruction from the teacher. Vygotsky argued that instruction needs to move ahead of development so scientific instruction could enlarge upon spontaneous learning. In this way, scientific instruction provides the child with the language to discuss the concept which has been experienced in the everyday activity.

Vygotsky (1986) explains that oral speech is a spontaneous activity utilized in everyday experiences, whereas writing can be a more abstract activity sometimes learned primarily through instruction at school. Words learned in everyday experiences are just
spoken; but those same words need to be symbolically imagined to be written. As researcher Gordon Wells, an expert in sociocultural theory and writing explained:

“Action is realized through oral discourse of an informal kind…in contrast with the more individually controlled creation or reception of a written text” (1999, p. 240). Scientific instruction in writing helps the students to reach higher levels of speech development and eventually to do in writing what they can already spontaneously do in speech. In this way, writing instruction provides the necessary tools so that as students acquire the skills of writing, they learn to consciously apply them to writing (Halliday, 1993).

Development and instruction have different “rhythms” but they are connected. While learning a scientific concept, the child’s development starts, but complete understanding might not occur until subsequent lessons. Instruction in one area influences the higher functioning levels in other areas (Vygotsky, 1986). Through scientific instruction the teacher explains, supplies information, and asks questions so that the student can master the concepts which will help to enhance everyday spontaneous knowledge.

Bruner (1990) and Applebee (1986) built on Vygotsky’s foundation to provide what they called “scaffolding” for students as they conversed with the teacher. In this way the teacher is able to provide knowledge both in words and actions that would support the student during instruction. Through instructional scaffolding “new skills are learned by engaging collaboratively in tasks that would be too difficult for the individual to undertake alone but that can be completely successful in interaction with parent or teacher” (Applebee, 1986, p. 108). Scaffolding then is an extension of the ZPD.
Language is a means of learning. As individuals interact within various situations, meaning is constructed based on personal and shared cultural experiences. Through language individuals learn about others and themselves. In the educational setting the teacher uses language to build scientific concepts and scaffold learning. Learning is not only a social activity; it is also a contextual one.

Learning is Contextual

School is an institution where there is a specific set of rules and discursive practices through which individuals make meaning and construct knowledge. It is through language practices that the “rules, principles, and standards” which inform school can be learned by individuals (Frowe, 2001). Students need to participate in school to learn the practices of school. Learning and thinking are relational knowing activities during which the individual learns by doing because it is social meaning that gives language the capacity to mean (Gergen, 1994). Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote of this as an apprenticeship model which includes people at various stages of learning who, when completely immersed in the activity, learn from each other. Learning occurs by participating in the activity within the community of practice.

Writing involves social mediation in negotiating meaning. The meaning of the written language is found within the context of social interactions (Eagleton, 1996). An educational framework, grounded in sociocultural theory, builds on the classroom as a community of learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 2000). The teacher and students are “active participant[s], not passive consumer[s]…striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world” (hooks, 1994, p. 15-16). Writing is
explored and learned as children interact with their peers and adults within a social context.

Language is utilized in different contexts to support an individual’s actions or his perspectives with his affiliation in a culture or social group (Gee, 1999, 2001a). Language is tied to a person’s experience and action in the world. Therefore words, phrases, and sentences are situated in specific contexts. Language is about “communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative and competing perspectives” (2001a, p. 716). Gee further explains that children learn how words and grammar work in a particular experience by “interactive, intersubjective dialogue with more advanced peers and adults” (2001a, p. 716).

When children are learning about a new discourse, it involves more than learning a language. According to Gee (1989; 2001b) it is similar to possessing a kit that gives someone all the tools, costumes, and instructions to tell him how to act, talk, think, value, interact, etc. within a certain culture or institution. In this case, school discourse requires a kit that needs to be learned and acquired. There are many discourses, and they can complement each other or conflict with each other bringing the individual added perspectives or tensions.

Within school discourse there are culturally accepted models of language and behavior. Cultural models are “everyday theories (i.e., storylines, images, schemas, metaphors, and models) about the world that people socialized into a given discourse share” (Gee, 2001, p. 719). The cultural model defines what is normal or the accepted way to behave within a discourse. For example, within a school discourse, there are expected cultural models for how to answer questions, how to write in a correct form, and
how to behave. Students learn to write five-paragraph essays, to raise their hands when they wish to speak, and to answer multiple-choice questions. They also learn the language to use while speaking and writing at school. Within school discourse there are specific behaviors and ways of thinking that teachers are expected to pass along to the students so that they are successful in school.

Learning is contextual and within the institution of school there are particular practices including language and behaviors that students need to learn. The teacher is not only the modeler of school discourse but also the instructor of it. In fact, Cambourne (2001) noted that children who struggle with literacy learning may do so because they have had “faulty demonstrations” by teachers or others. This puts a weight of responsibility on the teacher to provide accurate and useful demonstrations of language in use, school discourse, and other aspects of literacy learning. Within this sociocultural stance, the teacher’s role reflects beliefs that learning is social and contextual.

The Role of the Teacher

Literacy as a social practice (Street, 1995) provides an opportunity for students to talk and act; and through this literacy event the teacher can better understand the children. Listening to students in the process of writing opens the door for the teacher to hear and be aware of the student’s struggles in learning (Lassonde, 2006). Through talk children have the opportunity to experience various genres which can be transferred to their writing (Rowe, Fitch, & Bass, 2001). Students construct knowledge and learn school discourse in writing workshop through the process of social interaction.
The Teacher’s Language and Learning

Language transmits not only content knowledge but also perceptions (Gee, 2001a). How students see themselves as learners influences their opportunities for learning (Chaiklin & Lave, 1995). When a student views himself as a writer, he then is able to learn more about being a writer; because it is through the process of writing that he creates the feeling of being a writer (Clark & Ivanic, 1997). The language that teachers choose to use can not only open learning for the students but also enhance their self-perceptions as authors in a writing classroom.

There are educator-researchers who have described specific ways in which words can be used to enhance instruction. Through the power of words, the teacher can create a reality and invite students to participate (Johnston, 2004). Johnston has coined the phrase “noticing and naming” as two categories of language that teachers can utilize. When a teacher “notices” what the students are saying or doing, she is recognizing them: who they are and what they do. By noticing the students’ actions the teacher is stating their importance. After noticing an action or text use, the teacher can “name” it which provides students with a label for it. Noticing and naming are positive ways that teachers can use language during instruction.

Cazden (1992) suggests that there are two strategies for offering assistance to students during literacy instruction: revealing and telling. Revealing is a process of leading students to understanding a concept, whereas telling involves explicit instruction. One benefit of naming and telling students about their actions is that they learn metalanguage to connect with their performance. Learning the skills and metalanguage
connected to writing is related to the context of writing instruction which is a type of school discourse.

How students see themselves as writers is influenced by how others see and value them (Lassonde, 2006). The teacher can play a vital role by creating realities that students can claim during conference times. By noticing and naming the student’s performance, the teacher can help the student to shape his perceptions of literacy and self.

In summary, students have an identity kit for the discourses to which they belong which include cultural models of accepted behaviors. When students are being introduced to school discourse, they can use the language of various discourses in their writing and interactions. When writing about their lived experiences, they are using their home and school discursive language as they learn more school discourse. Within the writing process, students come to think of themselves as authors as modeled in school. In my research I found that Ms. Newman reached out to her students no matter where they were in this process of assimilation into school discourse and helped them find their place. She has termed this process “being productive” as a student. It is not the amount of writing the students do, but it is improving as a writer, to move toward being successful in school discourse.

**Conclusion**

Based on a sociocultural framework, learning is social and contextual. Learning utilizes language as a means of constructing knowledge from personal and collective experiences. Learning at school involves participating in the school discourse where the teacher brings the student’s spontaneous everyday learning to a higher plane through
scientific teaching. A sociocultural framework provides a clear view for me for the understanding of the interactions which occur between student and teacher in writing instruction.

As teachers ponder the tension between product-centered and process-centered writing, this sociocultural framework can provide a lens from which to view a solution. Writing, for example, can be taught within the cultural process of making meaning within social interactions. Studying the language use within the interactions during writing instruction is important as these interactions comprise the vehicle for learning. Since the expert person in this interaction directs the learning into higher mental levels, observing the teacher during writing workshop is vital to understanding the process. It is through a sociocultural lens that I pose to answer my research questions. (1) How does the teacher use language to build relationships within the community of writing workshop? (2) How does the teacher use language to provide social assistance during writing conferences?

In Chapter One I have laid a sociocultural groundwork stating that learning is a social and contextual activity that utilizes language as a vehicle for constructing meaning. In Chapter Two I will define four models of writing workshop and the role of language in learning to write. Chapter Three will explain the methodological design and research plan of this study. Chapter Four will introduce the participants of my study. In Chapter Five I will present the findings which answer my first question, “How does the teacher use language to build relationships within the community of writing workshop?” In Chapter Six I will present the findings to answer my second question, “How does the teacher use language to provide social assistance during writing conference?” Finally, Chapter Seven will analyze the Kid Writing curriculum in light of this study and state its implications.
Chapter 2
The Roles of Language during Writing Workshop

In the previous chapter I described a sociocultural framework of learning including the importance of the teacher’s language. In this chapter I will situate Kid Writing within a pedagogical framework of writing workshop. Through the lens of a sociocultural approach to language, I define and describe writing workshop and four models of this instructional approach. Next, I explain the role of language within each model. Finally, I analyze the Kid Writing curriculum and position it within these models of writing workshop. In essence, this chapter reveals the roles that language plays during writing workshop.

The following is a story that second-grade teacher, Ms. Newman, shared with me about one of her students. Bob was a hesitant writer who lacked confidence at the beginning of the year and would write minimally (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2006, line 108). In the fall Bob wrote “I like green” and then he drew a picture of something green. The next day he wrote “I like blue” and drew a picture of something blue. Ms. Newman said that this writing behavior continued for a long time, but she knew he could write more. She began to help him by talking with Bob about all the things that were green, such as the colors of a sport’s team. When Ms. Newman learned that Bob enjoyed professional wrestling, she began talking to him about this topic (Ms. Newman, personal communication, August 1, 2007). After discussing wrestling with Ms. Newman, Bob began drawing pictures and writing about a different wrestler each day. Over time, his stories became longer and contained more details as he described various wrestling
matches. Through conversations, Ms. Newman expanded Bob’s thinking so that he began to realize that his writing opportunities were endless. Since Bob wasn’t a risk-taker when he was spelling words in his journal, Ms. Newman reminded him that it was appropriate to use “kid writing” spelling. Plus she reminded him about the resources around the room that could help him when he wasn’t confident of the spelling, such as the word wall: a bulletin board in the room with words used often by second graders (Figure 4). By supporting Bob through conversations and demonstrations, Ms. Newman encouraged him to write more.

In December Bob wrote the following journal entry.

I want 3 video games for Christmas. Do you want to know what video games that I want? Star Wars Battle Front 2 and Tony Hawk American Wasteland and Amazing Spiderman. Or something like those videogames are cool they look awesome!!! They look really cool. (Bob, journal, December, 2005)

The next day he continued this entry by explaining what made a game cool, and on the following days he wrote about the roles that the players performed in each game.

Although Bob did not write this fluently everyday, he did gain confidence in himself because Ms. Newman believed he could write. She used her discursive practices purposefully to guide and direct him to write.

Ms. Newman describes her expertise as a “language of conferencing.” She explained,

[It is so important to use encouraging wording to foster a continued interest in the writing process with supportive terms. While I am conferencing, I don’t pick [special] words in my mind, it is just part of the ‘language of conferencing.’] (Ms. Newman, personal communication, July 30, 2007)

According to Tobin (1993), the teacher has the responsibility to build relationships with and among the students so that the writing experience is productive for
each student. The story of Ms. Newman and Bob supports Tobin’s argument that relationship building by the teacher can lead to success, and that the teacher builds this relationship through her language during writing instruction. Ms. Newman calls this the “language of conferencing.”

**A Socio-linguistic View of Language Use in Instruction**

Individuals construct knowledge within the context of shared understandings, practices, and language; so to know how language works one must understand the workings of social practices within specific discourses (Gee, 1992). Also it is the social aspect that gives language the capacity to mean (Gergen, 1994). In the socio-linguistic perspective, language gains meaning within specific social contexts.

**Language as a Social Activity**

From a socio-linguistic viewpoint, writing is not just an individual act but also a social act; thus when writing, children use language, thinking, and cultural habits to compose texts (Dyson, 1989; McLane, 1990). It is through language that humans understand their place in society. From this perspective, one function of language is to provide support for performing a social activity so that people can interact within the culture, social group, or institution (Gee, 1999). Thus “language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge” (Halliday, 1993, p. 94). Socio-linguists believe that humans co-construct knowledge via language.

Language is also the basis of learning a new discourse. Gee (2001b) defines discourse as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking,
and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (p. 1). Writing instruction represents a “school discourse” which is typically different from the discourse that students engage in at home (Cazden, 1988; Gee, 1989; Heath, 1983). These social practices at school are clearly influenced and mediated by the use of language (Frowe, 2001). It is through discursive practices that the teacher instructs and helps the students to bridge between the home and the school discourse.

**The Teacher’s Language**

It is the role of the teacher as an expert to choose language which best introduces students into school discourse. School is a specific context for learning, and teachers create social communities with their language practices in order to encourage writing and engage learners. Teachers also use their language to provide assistance to mentor students during writing conferences (Cazden, 1992; Johnston, 2004). Knowledge co-construction via language is a social activity. As such, the teacher sets the stage for these discursive practices by situating writing instruction within a community.

Many researchers have studied the importance of talk and community within the context of children’s writing (Dyson, 1989; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Lensmire, 1994). Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) found that in order to achieve the educational goal of knowledge construction, classrooms “need to become communities of literate thinkers engaged in collaborative inquiries” (p. 100). When these collaborative activities involve writing and dialogue as the means to build knowledge, then students not only increase their understanding but also improve their writing skills (Haneda & Wells, 2000). The
teacher utilizes language that supports the writing process (Applebee, 1986). In this way the teacher’s intentional language choice assists in creating the social community of learners and in teaching the students literacy skills.

According to Gee (1989), gestures that draw students into discussions also help improve the learning environment. When a teacher looks at the student while pointing to the text being discussed, the student is better able to focus on the instruction. When actions and words align, positive attention and direction are enhanced for the students if they are interpreting the words and gestures in the same way that the teacher intended. The teacher’s language includes more than just the words she vocalizes. Her accompanying gestures can also affect the meaning of her dialogue.

During conferencing time the instructional relationship between student and teacher includes specific language. According to Cazden (1992) there are two types of social assistance that students need in order to better learn to read and write. First, the teacher needs to reveal information to the students through a process of discovery. Second, the teacher should explicitly tell the students the necessary information which Delpit (1995) also stresses as important for learning. Both strategies need to be purposefully implemented into literacy learning at appropriate times.

Through questions and statements students can be guided through the process of discovering knowledge (Eodice, 1998; Haneda & Wells, 2000). At the same time, by being told certain facts, students are able to gain useful metalanguage which will help them to understand what they are doing. Therefore the language that the teacher uses is extremely vital in assisting them to learn to write. By teaching the necessary skills and
also by providing the explanation or metalanguage to label both the thoughts and actions of
the students, the teacher aids in the writing process.

As the teacher is assisting the students, she also recognizes the words and actions of the
students by “noticing and naming” them (Johnston, 2004). When a teacher “notices” what
the students are saying or doing, she is recognizing them: who they are and what they do.
By noticing the students’ actions the teacher is stating their importance. After noticing an
action or text use, the teacher can “name” it which provides a label for it. For example, when
the teacher notices that a student is rereading his text and making changes, she names this
action as a self-editing strategy. As Cazden (1992) mentions, this telling also provides a
metalanguage which then the students have access to use on their own. So that now the
student knows and can label the action of self-editing.

In summary, the teacher’s language is important for two reasons. First, as the expert, the
teacher chooses language which assists students in learning the school discourse. Since
school is a situated social practice, it is important that the teacher model and teach the
discursive practices in a contextual manner. One way in which the teacher begins to do
this is by creating a community of learners with her language practices where knowledge
is constructed collaboratively among novice and expert learners (Wells & Chang-Wells,
1992). This collaborative setting affords interactive dialogue among the students and
with the teacher which is another role of the teacher’s language.

Second, the teacher’s language plays a significant role during instruction. Through
questions and statements, the teacher guides the students to discover knowledge. Also, the
teacher explicitly tells facts to the students. While interacting with the students,
the teacher utilizes “noticing and naming” strategies to assist the students in understanding their own actions and in labeling their meta-knowledge.

Although there are many influences on the teacher, she is the person who pragmatically decides how to orchestrate those factors. Ultimately the teacher can have an important role to play in the classroom as she uses her language and discursive practices to design a learning community conducive to writing instruction in her role as expert in the collaborative community (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

**Writing Workshop and the Role of Language**

Literacy learning includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking, and viewing (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Although this study emphasizes the written aspect, it is difficult to separate all the components of literacy learning because they are so integrated. When writing is taught, all the other aspects of literacy are also actively present. The writing workshop strategy is a process writing approach that integrates all these aspects of literacy, linking them through language within social interaction. When writing is learned as a process, the emphasis is placed on the act of writing with the acquisition of skills following the practice of writing (Calkins, 1986, 1994; Graves, 1983).

Teachers who utilize the writing workshop approach ascribe to socio-linguistic assumptions about literacy learning (Manning, Manning, Long, & Wolfson, 1987). First, children construct their own knowledge. Second, writing is a natural outgrowth of oral language. Third, learning to write is a social activity where risk-taking is important and making mistakes is vital to learning. In the writing workshop classroom, children are
active participants in the social activity of constructing knowledge and using writing to learn to write.

Cambourne and Turbill (1991) after observing students concluded that certain conditions were present during the writing process. First, the learners were immersed in the written medium and the teacher demonstrated how these texts were constructed and used. Then, the teacher set high standards and positive expectations for her students; and in turn, the students were empowered with responsibilities to choose topics and write. While writing, students practiced their skills where their approximations or “mistakes” were accepted. During this literacy journey, students received appropriate, meaningful, and non-threatening responses from the teacher. When students were engaged in learning, they wrote purposefully. The teacher’s engagement varied according to the needs of the student, but she was always present to assist in helping students to make decisions. Writing occurred in an encouraging environment where both the students and the teacher have expectations and responsibilities to become engaged in the writing process.

The specific components of writing workshop are student writing, minilessons by the teacher, conferences between the student and the teacher, the student sharing writing with other students and with the teacher, the student revising work, and finally the student publishing a finished product (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Murray, 1986). A writing workshop approach views writing as a recursive process (Flower & Hayes, 1980) with students composing texts about personal experiences (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1986). Learning to write is a process of constructing knowledge with others (Lensmire, 1998) and developing an important relationship between the teacher and students (Tobin, 1993).
There is a sense of order and structure which is essential to the participants utilizing workshop time wisely; however it could look chaotic to the uninitiated. Writing occurs daily for long periods of time (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987; Graves, 1983) with materials easily accessible so that students can be independent and responsible. There is time for talking and moving, so that social interaction can create the urge to write that will sustain a silent writing time (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991). Writing workshop stresses development of a community where it is vital to share stories, both orally and visually. During writing workshop students develop a sense of urgency to share their stories in conversation and in text.

According to Calkins and Harwayne (1987), conferencing is the heart of writing workshop. Although there is no preferred format for conducting conferences, the most essential aspect is for the teacher to listen to the student (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991; Murray, 2000). After understanding the meaning that the student is trying to communicate, the teacher focuses on one concept which she would like to discuss (Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005). The tone of the conference is conversational and collegial because the goal of conferring is for the students to become “learners-of-writing” and not just “producers-of-good-writing” (Calkins, 1986, p. 145).

In summary, writing workshop endorses a socio-linguistic approach to learning. Writing workshop represents a holistic approach because reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing are integrated into writing instruction. Language is the center of instruction because writing is based on the lived experiences and language knowledge that the students bring to school. Writing workshop is centered on community that involves interaction with peers, teacher, and text. By reading and dialoguing about texts,
authors, and literature, knowledge is constructed and writing skills are learned. During writing workshop, writing is an interactive social activity involving all the aspects of literacy.

Models of Writing Workshop

Since its inception, writing workshop, as a format for instruction, has been used with various constructive models of writing instruction. There are four models which can be identified: expressionist, socio-linguistic, psycho-linguistic, and critical. Each of these models adheres to the writing workshop approach to writing, but they emphasize different aspects of this approach.

Expressionist Model

The individual is the most important aspect of the expressionist model of writing workshop because to proponents of this model writing is a very private and personal endeavor. It is through the process of writing about personal experiences that the individual finds his voice and composes a valued text (Murray, 1982, 1999). Through journal writing and free writing, students engage in the art of writing and learn the skills of writing. The teacher supports the students in the writing process with conferences.

In this model, language is a dialogue between the student and the teacher. At the same time, it is the student who is encouraged to do the talking because it is his experience which is being discussed and written; he is the expert. Murray (2000) labels the teacher’s role as the “listening eye” where the teacher is ever vigilant to lend a hand, but often just needs to be a supportive listener because the students usually find their own
way through their maze of questions and concerns about their text. Although language is a dialogue at conference time, the student engages in the majority of the talk whereas the teacher mostly listens.

**Socio-linguistic Model**

This model begins with writing personal experiences, but it adds more emphasis to the role of language within the community of writers. Students are given free choice of writing topics. They compose in journals learning the skills from the process (Graves, 1983; Graves & Stuart, 1985). Peer interaction is encouraged because meaning-making is a constructive process. The role of the teacher is as facilitator within this writing workshop format.

As the title of this model implies both the social and language aspects are important during writing. Student interaction with peers and the teacher not only communicates information but also helps to construct knowledge about and for writing (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Within the writing workshop format there are multiple conversations occurring, as students talk about their topics and read their texts to one another. The teacher has many miniconferences with students as she monitors student progress during writing workshop (Graves, 1994). Her conference agenda is directed by the student’s text. The student is still the expert of his topic, but the community of writers through dialogue helps him to polish the text.
Psycho-linguistic Model

Again this model includes the aspects of the previous two writing workshop models described, but adds a more teacher-directed role. Students continue to use their lived experiences as a basis for writing and dialogue within the community of learners for constructing meaning (Calkins, 1994). As the model title suggests, there is more of an emphasis on the cognitive part of writing and teaching. Writing can be thought of as thinking put into text, and as such, when the teacher emphasizes the skills aspects of writing, the text should be affected positively (Hillcocks, 1984). During conference times the teacher plays a more directed role of teaching skills and metalanguage to the students while being led by their texts (Calkins et al., 2005; Cazden, 1992). The role of the teacher is to provide instructional scaffolding during the writing process (Applebee, 1986; Bruner, 1990).

In the psycho-linguistic model, language continues to play a vital role during writing for both students and teacher. Students are encouraged to interact while writing to help in the composing of texts. The teacher continues to interact during conference times but with more purposeful dialogue. Based on Vygotsky’s (1978) argument that a learner can be pulled into a higher thinking level when interacting with an expert, the teacher plays the role of instructional scaffolder (Applebee, 1986). The student is the expert on his topic, but the teacher is the more knowledgeable writer. Because of this more directed approach to conferring, there is more structure during the conference (Calkins et al., 2005). Common language terms develop to better discuss procedures and provide metalanguage (Cazden, 1992; Johnston, 2004). Some curricula such as Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) have been developed to help teachers utilize more
purposeful language and structure in this model. In the psycho-linguistic model, writing is a social process utilizing more purposeful language from the teacher.

**Critical Model**

The critical model rests firmly in the sociocultural approach to writing with the teacher playing a purposeful role introducing a socio-critical awareness into instruction. During writing workshop Lensmire (1994; 2000) discovered that students often reproduced some of the social injustices or stereotypes present in society in their writing. Lensmire used writing workshop not only as a time for students to write, but also as a time for them to think more critically about the classroom community. Heffernan (2004) added the use of children’s literature to broaden the thinking of students concerning unheard voices and social justice issues. In the critical model, writing moves beyond the individual to the social community. Through dialogue and literature students are encouraged to become more critically aware of social justice issues; and in turn, their writing as well as their thinking is affected.

In the critical model of writing, language plays a significant role through interactive dialogue among the students and with the teacher. The students’ texts become a platform for discussing issues of fairness and justice (Lensmire, 1994; 2000). The teacher’s language enlightens the students about these issues and provides a stage for discussion. Using literature with a social justice theme affords the teacher another avenue to educate the students regarding the facts and to provide a time for more discussion. The goal of the teacher is to help students to recognize injustices in literature, their writing, and the world; and then to act on these issues through their writing (Heffernan, 2004).
Language, therefore, is related not only to writing better but also to practice becoming a better citizen.

The critical model of writing instruction also provides space for the teacher to value the cultural resources that the students bring to writing (Dyson, 1993) which rely on the influence of popular culture rather than only lived experiences as writing genre (Newkirk, 2007). The genres of writing move beyond autobiographical to social justice awareness and also to the integration of popular culture. Within this writing model the teacher is challenged to simultaneously acknowledge “the cultural affiliations” that students bring to school and then to “imagine the futures that are not defined by what they bring in” (Newkirk, 2007, p. 547).

**Models Compared**

I have described four models of writing instruction which all utilize the writing workshop format. It would seem from my description that the models are distinct and separate entities, but this is not true. For the sake of description, I have pointed out their subtle differences and labeled each model; but it is better to think of these models on a continuum where the teacher moves back and forth emphasizing various aspects of writing depending on the needs of the students in the class and her instructional goals.

Writing workshop models -- expressionist, socio-linguistic, psycho-linguistic, and critical -- are more alike than different. They each utilize a sociocultural approach to encourage the students to write about their lived experiences. Through conferencing, the teacher instructs the student concerning his writing. There is dialogic interaction within the classroom community where meaning is constructed socially. In reality, the
knowledgeable teacher moves among these models emphasizing the personal, cognitive, or critical aspects as necessary.

In essence, the teacher is the one to implement the various writing models within her classroom during writing workshop. She is responsible to choose when to utilize a specific model and how to direct her language choice to meet the specific needs of the students. Each of these models has inherent strengths as previously mentioned and shortcomings to be discussed. Just as the teacher utilizes the positive aspects of each writing model to her advantage, she must also be aware of the possible problem areas of each model.

The expressionist model of writing assumes that the student is self-confident and motivated to write. The student must provide his own ideas for writing and questions for conferring. Within this model it might be necessary for the teacher to be more directed and to play a more active role than proposed by the expressionist model.

A possible shortcoming of the socio-linguistic model is an over-emphasis of the social aspect of writing. When students interact, they can easily become off-task and distracted. This possible problem could be averted by the active participation of the teacher with students via miniconferencing throughout the workshop.

Another problem that might arise during the implementation of the psycho-linguistic model of writing is an overemphasis on direct instruction especially when it was not driven by the student’s work. Having purposeful language and structure is important to this model; but when those goals supersede the needs of the students, the essence of writing workshop could be lost.
Although the critical model of writing addresses the ideologies in writing and literature and provides space for discussion and thinking, some might say that there is not enough time spent on the details of how to write. Others might say that there is too much writing that children need to do to take time for social awareness discussion.

The role of the teacher’s language in each model would be slightly different as she led the student to become the type of writer as defined by that model. In each model writing knowledge is co-constructed and guided by the teacher’s language use. Table 1 provides an overview of these language uses within each writing model. In the expressionist model while encouraging the student to creatively express his own opinions, the teacher is the sounding board for the student’s ideas. Within the socio-linguistic model the teacher encourages dialogue among the students and with herself to define the ideas that the student wishes to write. In the psycho-linguistic model the teacher’s specific language helps the student to utilize various grammar and writing skills. Within the critical model the teacher uses her language to help the student become aware of social justice issues that appear in his writing. Depending upon the teacher’s curricular goal for the student’s writing, the teacher could choose among these models to guide the student toward a particular style of writing.
Table 1. Comparison of Writing Models and Teacher’s Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Teacher’s Goal for Student’s Writing</th>
<th>Example of Student Writing</th>
<th>Example of Teacher Talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expressionist</strong></td>
<td>To express individual creativity</td>
<td>Creative and personal: “On Sunday I went for a hike in the woods.”</td>
<td>“Tell me what you want to say in this story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-linguistic</strong></td>
<td>To dialogue with peers while writing</td>
<td>Community involvement: “The class hiked to the wetlands. We saw…”</td>
<td>“Let’s talk about what it is you want to say in this story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psycho-linguistic</strong></td>
<td>To utilize specific writing skills and strategies</td>
<td>Writing to specific skills: “Me and Kate went on a hike.”</td>
<td>“When you talk about yourself, do you use the word ‘me’? What if we cover up ‘Kate,’ would you say ‘me went on a hike?’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical</strong></td>
<td>To address issues of fairness and power in writing</td>
<td>Social justice issues: “At recess the girls jumped rope because the boys wouldn’t let them play soccer.”</td>
<td>“In your story, were the boys being fair to the girls? Is this similar to the story we read yesterday? Let’s discuss what is really happening in your story.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the teacher moves back and forth utilizing these various writing models, she has a two-fold job. One, she needs to choose what writing model best meets her instructional goals. Two, she needs to plan to avoid possible problems inherent in different writing models. Through conscious instructional planning and delivery, these writing models can be used advantageously.

**Writing Workshop in Ms. Newman’s Second-Grade Classroom**

Writing workshop is about to begin in Ms. Newman’s class. The students are hunting for their journals and walking around the room gathering markers and pencils. At
one table students are talking about making a robot -- an activity the whole class was working on previously -- and how they are going to write about that. At another table Terri is reading her scary story to see if it terrifies her friends. Nate and Albert are collaborating on a story about being President and Vice President of the United States; while Mary is drawing beautiful prom dresses and all the accessories, so that she can write about a closet full of lovely clothes. All the students are engaged with reading, writing, drawing, talking, or listening as they participate in the social activity of writing.

When the students have settled into their writing, Ms. Newman asks individuals if they are ready for “adult writing,” her term for conferencing. She listens to them read their text and then talks with them about their journal entry. Sometimes students approach her because they are so excited to share their stories. Later Ms. Newman sees that Tailyn is struggling with how to write her story, so she chooses a literature book off the shelf to show Tailyn how another author writes his story. Minilessons for conferring occur throughout the writing workshop, and they last from a few minutes to 15 minutes. Lessons are individualized to meet the student’s needs based on their composed text. Conference times include reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing the journal entries. At the end of writing workshop, students gather in small groups to read their stories so that everyone gets a chance to sit in the author chair.

This vignette reveals the socio-linguistic aspects of writing workshop. Writing workshop is a social event during which students co-construct knowledge through language so that they are able to compose texts. Both the teacher and peers support students in the process. In Ms. Newman’s class, writing workshop integrates reading, writing, listening, speaking, and drawing to provide the opportunities for these students to
share lived experiences and learn to write. The next section of this chapter will note the aspects of the Kid Writing program in Ms. Newman’s classroom and situate Kid Writing within the psycho-linguistic model of writing workshop.

**Kid Writing: a Psycho-linguistic Curriculum of Writing Workshop**

Ms. Newman uses the Kid Writing curriculum which utilizes a writing workshop format. The Kid Writing manual (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) provides a roadmap for teachers to introduce children to writing through journaling which is a cooperative learning experience in which children are supported in learning to transfer their oral stories into written text (Calkins, 1994).

**A Balanced Literacy Approach**

The Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) curriculum was published in the 1990s at a time when a more traditional approach to literacy instruction, emphasizing explicit phonetic teaching, was again being accentuated (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Another literacy approach which had been introduced in the 1980s was that of whole language which advocated a process approach to writing (Calkins, 1983; Calkins & Harwayne, 1987; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Murray, 1986). Explicit phonics teaching reflects an essentialist philosophy which emphasizes teaching skills in isolation; whereas the progressive philosophy exhibited by whole language utilizes the context of literacy learning to allow students to become skilled at phonics while engaged in literacy. Feldgus and Cardonick (1999) have attempted to bridge these two pedagogical approaches to writing by proposing to utilize the teacher’s expertise within a writing workshop format to provide explicit instruction in phonics based on the child’s needs. Writing workshop
provides the structure and freedom in which students can write and in which teachers can obtain the information needed to conduct specific instruction in phonics and writing. Feldgus and Cardonick (1999) provide the framework for a balanced literacy approach as Strickland, Galda and Cullinan (2004) have more recently suggested is needed.

The *Kid Writing* authors have bridged a gap in pedagogical differences by redefining systematic phonetic instruction. They propose that through authentic journal writing within a writing workshop format teachers can provide explicit phonics instruction based on the needs of the students rather than on a predetermined scope and sequence.

Feldgus and Cardonick (1999) define phonics instruction as

a systematic, rigorous, planned, and essential part of the fuller instructional program throughout the school day...[T]he systematicity appears not in the materials used to teach phonics, nor in the order in which sound-symbol correspondences are taught, but in the social interaction between the teachers and children and in the attention to children’s individual needs and abilities. Children learn phonics as they master other concepts and learn about their world. Teachers measure their students’ understanding of phonics and other conventions of writing by looking closely at their writing processes and products. (p. 3)

The *Kid Writing* curriculum represents a balanced approach to teaching phonics and writing. In *Kid Writing*, phonics instruction is part of the classroom instruction which is accomplished during the natural evolution of the writing process. The *Kid Writing* curriculum integrates the teaching of phonics throughout the whole day within a balanced literacy program of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Building on a reading and writing connection, children are able to become successful readers. The authors explain, “For many children writing is the gateway to understanding how reading works” (p. 6). Feldgus and Cardonick (1999) propose that by fostering early writing success more children can become successful readers.
Research shows that children use oral and written language to make meaning in context (Dyson, 1993; Saracho, 1993) and that writing is a personal and cognitive process of using language (Calkins, 1994; 1983; Halliday, 1993; Murray, 1986). Learning occurs while students are actively engaged in the process of writing. Students learn writing by doing, rather than by memorizing the conventions of grammar and spelling. In this pedagogical approach, the constructive process of writing is more important than the product of writing (Odell, 1980).

**A Social Process Approach**

The social process of language production involves the interaction of people and text. It is through this social interaction that the text is composed. The creation of the text is both a result of and a stimulus of the social process.

In *Kid Writing*, the foundation for teaching phonics is not the curriculum but the social interaction during the journal writing experience. Building on this social context of learning, the authors expect the teacher to encourage learning in accordance to Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development and by scaffolding (Bruner, 1990) during journal writing. By providing support while writing, the teacher can lead the children into higher levels of understanding phonetic and writing concepts.

This sociocultural approach to writing instruction views the students and the teacher as active participants in learning. The teacher helps students to navigate between discourses so that students can better understand social and cultural powers and problems (Gee, 2001). Writing is a social act that is empowering within certain language choices (Mitchell, 2004). The role of the teacher is to enlighten the students about the cognitive
issues that face them. By accepting the culture with which the students already identify, the teacher can build discourse and language knowledge so that students become powerful in their writing (Gee, 2001; Heath, 1983). The sociocultural approach to education moves beyond a social pedagogy because the teacher encourages students to become successfully literate in multiple discourses including home and school communities.

The *Kid Writing* curriculum utilizes two terms for writing: “kid writing” and “adult writing.” Students “are not expected to write exactly as adults do” rather their success is measured in their approximation attempts so teachers need “to recognize children’s partial successes” Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999, p. 24). It is important for the teacher to compare the kid writing to the adult writing so that children see accurate conventional spelling. The use of these two forms of writing aligns with the apprenticeship model where the expert teacher models for the novice students (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through social interaction both verbally and textually students are supported in the language and process of writing.

*A Psycho-linguistic Approach*

The *Kid Writing* curriculum states that it is founded philosophically on the social construction of knowledge and the integration of reading and writing across the curriculum (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999). The teacher and students interact with language within a writing workshop environment so that the teacher can scaffold learning. Knowledge about phonics and writing are socially constructed and learned through the process of writing. Instruction is based on the student’s needs as indicated through
writing and dialogue. The *Kid Writing* curriculum allows both explicit instruction by the teacher and a student-centered approach to writing.

*Kid Writing* is a psycho-linguistic approach to writing because of the emphasis in its instructional design. The title itself points to this -- *Kid Writing: A systematic approach to phonics, journals, and writing workshop*. Although the authors redefined the word systematic, the notion of phonics instruction is a cognitive plan. The teacher has purposeful language and strategies to help students understand the letter-sound relationship necessary for writing and reading. Within the format of writing workshop, students use stories of personal experience to write in their journals. During conference time the teacher provides instruction in phonics and other writing skills lessons as led by the student.

Writing workshop provides the setting for constructing knowledge through language interaction with peers and teacher. When students compose a text, that artifact is shaped by both the social interactions within the classroom and the social context of the school curriculum. The *Kid Writing* curriculum includes the literacy assumptions involved in a balanced literacy program and one that emphasizes phonics instruction. Language production for text construction is embedded in the social interactions and social context present during writing workshop.

*Kid Writing* represents a sociocultural approach to writing instruction because it holds the tenets of this view on learning. First, learning is social. Interaction among students and with the teacher is evident throughout *Kid Writing* workshop as students talk and draw, then write and confer, and finally share their stories. Second, learning is contextual. Students use their own lived experiences to create their stories, and through
talk at conference time the teacher introduces school discourse within the students’ writings. Language is the means of constructing knowledge in Kid Writing workshop.

**Conclusion**

It is through language that experiences become knowledge; therefore language is essential to learning. The role of language within the classroom is a discursive activity that helps students to make meaning within a specific context (Dyson, 1989; Gee, 1999; McLane, 1990). While learning to write, both interactive dialogue within the classroom community (Dyson, 1989; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Lensmire, 1994; 2000) and purposeful talk by the teacher are important (Cazden, 1992; Delpit, 1995; Johnston, 2004). Both the writing environment (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991) and the dialogic use of language are essential for literacy learning (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). All of these aspects of language use are evident in Kid Writing.

The sociocultural approach to writing instruction stresses that students should write about their lived experiences (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1986) in the writing workshop format where they dialogue with one another and confer with the teacher to learn writing. Language is an interactive dialogue in the Kid Writing workshop format.

The writing workshop models -- expressionist, socio-linguistic, psycho-linguistic, and critical -- each have a unique characteristic. The expressionist model emphasizes the individual (Murray, 1982, 1986). Kid Writing encourages the student to write about personal experiences. The socio-linguistic model relies on the importance of social construction of meaning during writing (Graves, 1983; Graves & Stuart, 1985). Kid
Writing allows for social dialogue throughout the workshop. The psycho-linguistic model expects the teacher to be more directed in her language to meet the cognitive needs of the students (Calkins et. al, 2005). At conference time the teacher uses purposeful language to introduce students to school discourse through their own writings. The critical model (Heffernan, 2004; Lensmire, 1994, 2000) adds the dimension of helping students to become more aware of the social injustices found in writing and literature. Kid Writing does not address this critical component.

The teacher oversees writing workshop while instructing her students in writing. The teacher can choose various aspects of the models to highlight in her teaching. Utilizing these models strategically during writing instruction can provide powerful pedagogical choices for the teacher and discourse knowledge for the students.

A review of Kid Writing through the writing workshop framework helps to contextualize the assumptions and goals of this curriculum. The goals of Kid Writing are to share lived experiences and to produce school discourse by correctly utilizing phonics in writing. The social process of writing is founded on the social construction of knowledge and the importance of interaction while writing. The teacher’s language plays a vital role in scaffolding writing during conference time. By choosing this curriculum, the school district in my study aligns itself with a sociocultural platform of learning to write. Although students and teacher are constructing knowledge together, there is a body of knowledge (phonics and writing skills) that the teacher knows and purposely and strategically plans to present during the dialogic process. Thus Kid Writing is a psycho-linguistic model of teaching within the writing workshop format.
In this chapter I discussed the basic components of writing workshop, and I highlighted the role of language during writing instruction. The teacher is a significant participant during writing instruction because she has a pedagogical plan based on a philosophical foundation. The next chapter will present the research design, the site description as well as the data gathering and analyzing processes.
Chapter 3

Methodology

It is important to know where this research occurred, which research design guided the study, how the data were gathered and analyzed, as well as how validity and biases were considered. For that reason, this chapter details the research site by describing the culture and demographics of the school. As well, I provide an introduction to the classes where this study occurred, and explain why this site was chosen. Second, I support my choice of microethnography as a research design. Next, the variety of data collection and interpretation methods is discussed. The chapter concludes with noting my biases along with validity measures.

My study is a story of a second-grade teacher and her students during writing instruction in the classroom setting. I studied this social phenomenon by collecting talk data during writing workshop and by interviewing the participants. The purpose of this study was to analyze the talk between teacher and student to better discern how the teacher’s language choice affected literacy learning.

The overarching question which directed this study was: What does the teacher’s language interaction during writing workshop reveal about literacy instruction? The focusing questions that appeared as I was analyzing data were the following. (1) How does the teacher use language to build relationships during writing workshop? (2) How does the teacher use language to provide social assistance during the writing conference? During this study I collected various data including instructional talk; parent, student, and teacher interviews; and the students’ journals. This chapter details the site description, the
research design, the data collection process, and the data analysis including research biases that could affect the study.

**Site Description**

This research was conducted at a university laboratory school in a rural town in a mid-Atlantic state in the United States. There were 122 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Although the laboratory school was a public school under the jurisdiction of the local school district, the building was on a university campus. Half of the faculty was employed by the school district, and half by the university. This unique partnership benefited both the local families who chose to have their children attend this school and the university students majoring in education, psychology, sociology, criminal justice, social work, and counseling who observed and participated in the classroom instruction (Shippensburg University, 2006).

An enrollment policy required parents to fill out an application. The selection process was overseen by the director who followed stated guidelines. Primarily enrollment was on a first-come, first-served basis with preference being given to younger siblings of current students. Of the seats, 20% were reserved for the university faculty and staff families (Shippensburg University, 2006). Of the 122 students at the school, 103 students were Caucasian, 11 students were African American, 5 were Asian, 2 were Hispanic, and 1 was Native American. Of the students nine received free or reduced school lunches. There were 66 boys and 56 girls enrolled.

The local school district provided the curriculum for the laboratory school, but the ultimate guidelines were the state’s educational standards. Although the curriculum of the
school was based on the local school district’s guidelines and the state’s educational standards, the laboratory school teachers had the freedom to depart from those guidelines to focus on the mission of the school (Shippensburg University, 2006). For example, because there were many university students observing at the laboratory school, the teachers modeled a variety of pedagogical practices plus different types of curricula throughout the school year. In some cases these “best practices” deviated from the suggested school district curriculum.

One of the stated cornerstones of the school and its mission is to teach the whole child. Therefore the teachers addressed the creative, social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development of the students (Shippensburg University, 2006). In many ways the teachers tailored and paced instruction according to the needs and abilities of the individual student within the curricular confines. Students received tutoring or enrichment activities from the university students who were active in the classrooms. There were often multiage activities centered on literacy or science themes in which the whole school participated.

Families were an integral part of the school and were welcomed into the classroom throughout the day. Adults volunteered in the classroom to help students with reading and writing projects such as journal writing. Parents helped in the cafeteria and on the playground. The families headed the all-school overnight camping field trip in the spring and the end-of-the-year picnic. The active parent organization raised funds to support school activities and field trips. The school families were very supportive of their children’s education.
I chose this site for my research for various reasons. The teachers at this school were comfortable sharing their ideas with university faculty and students; that is, they shared their lesson plans, reflections of their teaching, and even their challenges. The teachers were considered to be master teachers who utilized best practices in their instruction and were willing to pilot new curricula. As master teachers they were knowledgeable, experienced, and confident in their abilities, yet they were still willing learners. As a researcher I wanted to choose a site that would provide me with a natural environment to observe. Being part of a research project was not a new experience for these teachers, so I felt that I would be observing more natural classroom behavior. This idea was also true for the students who accepted other adults into the classroom easily. One of the goals of the laboratory school is to foster research; and I felt that the environment and the participants would provide me with authentic data.

In the fall of 2003 the school district adopted *Kid Writing* (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) for use in kindergarten through second grade. Previously the teachers in these grades had been utilizing their own writing programs which varied from copying sentences to journal writing. To that point, the school had not had an agreed upon curriculum for early literacy writing instruction. Through the leadership of the director of the laboratory school and with the financial support of the University, Eileen Feldgus was brought to the University to provide training in the *Kid Writing* program. Teachers from the local school district, the laboratory school, and other area school districts joined in the training seminar. In the spring of 2004 the kindergarten class began implementing this program.
The *Kid Writing* curriculum is a systematic approach to learning phonics and writing using writing workshop as a framework. This program is based philosophically on the premise that children need a supportive environment which provides them time to engage in writing and at the same time provides opportunities to stretch their potential through social interaction. When students begin to write (called “kid writing”) their attempts are validated and accepted, yet at the same time an adult models the conventional ways of writing (called “adult writing”). As the students’ writing develops, their “kid writing” begins to replicate the “proper” conventions of “adult writing.”

The *Kid Writing* program builds on the importance of social interaction, adult scaffolding and modeling, and individualized instruction (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999). The children write while seated as a group, yet they are composing their own journals. The talk that occurs among the students and with the teacher supports the writing process. When the teacher is conferring, she is teaching to the needs of that specific student. The teacher uses the class environment, peers, and dialogue to aid the students in the writing process. The purpose of the *Kid Writing* program is for children to construct meaning during writing instruction with the help of the community of learners in the classroom.

**Research Design**

Knowledge and meaning are socially constructed and are influenced by the historical and cultural setting of the environment (Gee, 1992; Schwandt, 2003; Street, 1995). Both students and teachers are influenced by the educational institution, the climate of the specific school, as well as the diversity found within the classroom. As students and teachers interact in the classroom, they co-construct the meaning which we
call school discourse. For this study, I chose to utilize an ethnographic research method which assumes that “by entering into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of their subjects than they can by using any other method” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 190). As a participant observer in the second-grade classroom, I became an integral part of that community.

An ethnographic design was the best fit for my research study for three reasons. First, I followed this particular class of students for three years. This prolonged observation period, a characteristic of an ethnography, (Creswell, 1998) allowed me to truly get to know and understand these students as individuals. Second, when I was in the classrooms during writing instruction, I participated in teaching small groups or individual students. In this way, I was better able to understand both the teacher’s and the students’ perspectives while conferring about writing. As a participant observer I was able to gain more intimate knowledge of the writing culture under study (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002). Third, I was studying the culture of the classroom and looking for patterns of behavior during writing instruction (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2001). As an ethnographer, I was gathering evidence to tell a story about the culture of writing instruction regarding this group of students.

Ethnography can very successfully be applied to an educational setting. As Spindler (1982) wrote, “The ethnographic world view assumes that any school, any group or community is a variant adaptation within a regional, national, and world-wide variation in culture and social organization” (p. 491). Ethnographic approaches to reading research (Guthrie & Hall, 1984) have become widely used because they enable the
researcher to understand the social and cognitive world in which students learn to read and write. As I utilized ethnographic approaches during this study of writing instruction, I was better able to understand how students and teacher construct knowledge and make meaning within literacy learning.

My ethnographic research utilized a three-stage process recommended by Guthrie and Hall (1984). First, during their kindergarten and first-grade years I became familiar with the community of students and the teachers plus the writing curriculum they were using for their literacy instruction. Second, I observed, engaged in conversations, and took field notes. Finally, when the students in my study were in second grade, I recorded literacy instruction sessions, as well as conducted interviews of students, their parents, and the teacher. These stages spiraled and overlapped as I continued to review and collect more data in order to form a better picture of instruction within the classroom setting.

Since I was studying only a small part of the classroom world -- writing instruction -- my study could be further classified as a microethnography, which is characterized by the fact that it “employ[s] ethnographic and socio-linguistic techniques to examine in detail small pieces of human behavior” (Guthrie & Hall, 1984, p. 95). Although I was studying the entire classroom community, I had collected data related specifically to individual writing conferencing. The study focused on the teacher’s uses of language to make meaning during writing instruction. In the role of ethnographer, I was observing and describing the culture of this second-grade classroom, but as a microethnographer I was particularly attentive to the discursive practices, specifically language use during writing instruction.
Data Collection

During my three years of observation I collected a variety of data, including interviews of the teacher, the students, and the parents; audiotapes and videotapes of classroom writing conferencing; field notes of the classroom community; and the students’ written journals (Appendix A). Focusing specifically on the questions regarding this research, during April and May 2006 I taped four writing workshop sessions that were 44, 42, 28, and 46 minutes long. I hired a photographer to videotape so that I could observe, take field notes, and interact with other students in the classroom. I used a tape recorder as a backup to the video recording.

In June and July 2006 I transcribed the four audiotapes. I had a colleague make an initial transcription of the primary conversation, and then I transcribed more closely. When the audio transcription was finished, I watched the video and noted the gestures made by the teacher and the students. These movements were transcribed within double parentheses. An example follows.

((nods head slightly and holds up one finger to Albert)) I’ll be over in a minute? And everyone in his neighborhood had heard him, Right? ((Sharon nods her head yes)) Heard him ((writes heard)) They ran to him ((writes)). (Sharon, conference, May 2, 2006, line 42)

This same procedure was followed for each of the four tapes from the classroom writing sessions. Then I consecutively numbered the transcripts at each turn change for easy reference.

In February 2006 I interviewed the teacher concerning her philosophical, pedagogical, and theoretical views on writing instruction (Appendix B). We also discussed other topics relating to classroom teaching. In April 2007 I conducted and taped a follow-up teacher interview with questions concerning my data findings and her
interactions with the students. During the summer of 2007 we dialogued via e-mail when I was in need of more clarification about her words and actions.

In order to better understand each student’s larger discourse, I also conducted interviews from the parents (Appendix C) and the students (Appendix D). In June 2006 I interviewed the six students chosen to participate in the study about their feelings regarding the importance and use of writing. I also asked them to share with me their favorite text from the journal entry they were writing during one of the recorded instruction sessions. I audiotaped all of these interviews except one because the parent asked that her child not be taped. In compliance with her wishes, I took extensive notes instead.

Socio-linguistic theory assumes that current writing experiences draw from students’ other discourses such as the home discourse. By talking with the students through an interview process, I was better able to understand their unique characteristics. The students discussed a journal entry and provided background information about why they wrote it or how Ms. Newman helped them with it. The information gathered provided me with data to confirm my findings regarding how Ms. Newman individualized her talk and writing lessons.

In order to better understand the student’s home discourse in relation to literacy, I interviewed the parents in June 2006. One parent declined to participate in the interview, and one parent was interviewed in September 2006. During the parent interviews I explored the components of the home environment which have traditionally been related to literacy instruction, such as the importance which the parent places upon reading and writing, and the presence of reading materials in the home. I also was able to gain more
insight into each student as an individual. I had a colleague listen to and transcribe the primary conversations from all the interviews, and then I made a more careful transcription.

The student journals are the written artifacts that provided me with textual data. I collected the students’ journals for the whole year (Appendix E). In order to understand the context of the instruction session, I was able to review not only the children’s writings from each videotaped session but also the entries before and after the observed sessions.

My involvement with these students began in the spring of 2004 when for three months I visited the kindergarten class weekly to conduct Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) lessons of 30 minutes with small groups of students. Although I was teaching third grade at that time in the same school, I was asked to introduce this curriculum as I was considered to be a literacy expert by my colleagues. This activity afforded me the opportunity to become familiar with both the student participants of my study and the curriculum which the teachers would be using to instruct writing. At the end of the three months, I collected a copy of the students’ journals.

During the spring of 2005, I videotaped the first-grade teacher, Ms. Kay, on four different days during typical 30 minute small-group writing instruction sessions utilizing the Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) curriculum. These first-grade students were the same class which I had worked with in kindergarten the year before, with the addition of one girl. The whole class of 20 students was divided purposefully by the teacher into four tables of five students of mixed abilities. The tables were named Star, Circle, Hearts, and Diamonds. In a typical Kid Writing session, the students drew pictures for 5 minutes to help them organize their writing ideas. Various adult helpers worked with each of the
tables so that the first-grade teacher could concentrate on the table of students which was being videotaped. After the students had started their writing, the teacher began to visit individual students and conference with them about their writing entry. During the spring of 2005, I also interviewed the first-grade teacher.

Working with the first-grade students and teacher afforded me the opportunity to refine my data collection and data analysis procedures (Cook, in press). I utilized various coding methods and found evidence of language that was conducive to building a writing community with first graders. Also, I was able to learn more about the participants in my study. In determining who should participate in this study, I conferred with Ms. Kay, the first-grade teacher. We considered race, ability, gender, and family socio-economics as we defined this small diverse group. Together we selected three boys and three girls. One of the children was African American and five were Caucasian. Academically, they were mixed in their writing abilities. The first-grade teacher made this writing judgment based on her knowledge of the type of work the student typically did in the classroom during literacy lessons.

The focus of this dissertation is the data that were collected in the second-grade classroom of Ms. Newman which included the same class of students from Ms. Kay’s first grade plus another girl. I continued to observe the six students chosen in first grade which became the focus of this study. During the spring of 2006, I visited the second-grade classroom over a four-month period to observe, take field notes, and collect video data of teacher talk during writing instruction. I started my data collection with an interview of Ms. Newman. Next, I observed the class three times during writing instruction in February and March 2006 to learn about the setting and the community of
Ms. Newman’s classroom. During these sessions, I took field notes of the teacher and student teacher instructing whole-group *Kid Writing* (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) lessons and individual conferencing by the teacher. My goal was also to observe the role that the teacher’s language played during instruction. In April and May 2006, I videotaped the second-grade teacher four times during writing workshop while she conferred with the six students chosen for the study in first grade. During this time I also observed the class and interacted with other students by conferring with them about their writing entries. In June 2006, I visited the classroom for one full day so that I could observe the whole classroom community. I also interviewed the students in my study about their feelings concerning writing.

There were 21 students (13 girls and 8 boys) in Ms. Newman’s second-grade class seated with 3 students per table. The seating arrangement changed monthly, but the teacher kept the six students in this study on the side of the room that was more easily adaptable to the videotaping during April and May 2006.

**Description of Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data utilizing discourse analysis methodology. Discourse in its simplest understanding is the practice of writing and talking (Gee, 1999; Woodilla, 1998). My data included the conversations about writing between student and teacher. Discourse also has more complex aspects. Discourse does not occur in isolation; it involves the construction of meaning as texts and practices interrelate (Gee, 1999; Parker, 1992). Social reality is constructed through social interactions which cannot be understood without referring to the discourses that give them meaning (Gee, 1999;
Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Also the context of the discourse must be revealed to understand the meaning of the discursive practices found therein (Cazden, 1988).

My study occurred in a school classroom during writing instruction utilizing school discourse which is the important context that must be considered while interpreting the data. In the school institution, literacy involves “learning formalized uses of language and subjecting oral to written conventions” (Street, 1995, p. 117) so that the students are learning the language, actions, values, and thinking strategies that would prepare them for success within the school setting. School discourse consists of specific practices as well as beliefs that are necessary for participating successfully in that context (Gee, 1992, 2004).

I utilized discourse analysis as a method of data analysis for several reasons (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). First, discourse analysis is founded on the assumptions of the social construction of meaning through the use of language. As a socioculturalist, I realize the important role that language plays in building knowledge within a social phenomenon. The discursive practices of the students and teacher together build knowledge about writing within the classroom. Second, discourse analysis has a reflexive nature because language reflects reality and language constructs reality (Gee, 1999). The categories of the analyses are discerned from the language of the phenomenon being studied.

Utilizing discourse analysis recognizes that there is a strong relationship between text, discourse, and context (Gee, 1999; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). I was able to study the social phenomenon of the teacher’s talk during writing conferencing by analyzing the discourse that occurred between the teacher and the student. The interpretation of the talk
cannot be understood without also considering the text of the writing curriculum and the context of the educational classroom. For this reason, I collected data which included interviews with the teacher, parents, and students that added information about their knowledge and perceptions of teaching and learning how to write.

By following linguistic and thematic threads of language, I determined patterns in the conversation. These linguistic patterns included uses of words such as pronouns and modals, phrases, and sentences. The thematic patterns included teaching strategies such as reading and listening, thinking aloud, and teaching explicitly. Analyzing these themes and the language structure of signs and symbols provided me with an understanding of how the teacher used language to construct meaning with the students. By observing the structure and the types of talk as well as the actions of the teacher, I analyzed how the discussion and interactions between teacher and students facilitated learning to write in the second grade.

I coded and determined linguistic patterns or themes according to language structure and content themes as Koshik (2002) did while analyzing language during writing conferences for second-language learners. Content or phenomenological themes are like “knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Linguistic and thematic patterns are located in the structure and words of the language used. I coded the data by identifying recurring words and themes. First I color coded, and then I cut the units from the whole data including the preceding and following text so that each unit was viewed within the context and flow of the language. Through the use of content
analysis, I was able to determine themes in the text that I then connected with a broader context.

Intertextual analysis in my research occurred when I compared the findings of the writing conference data with the findings from the classroom observations and the interviews of students, parents, and teacher. In this way, I was able to compare how students and teachers made sense of one another and the written text in various situations (Lemke, 2001). In this comparison of texts, I determined the roles that the discursive practices revealed in the data.

Analyses of these data provided me with the thematic content of the conferences between the teacher and the students, the linguistic structure of the interaction, and the extralinguistic forms utilized during instruction. These patterns revealed the kinds of interaction that occurred during writing instruction so that discursive practices and attitudes as well as words were better analyzed.

**Validity and Bias**

In qualitative research, validity “has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description” (Janesick, 2003, p. 69). Because there is no one correct interpretation in research of this type, it is important to make sure the description (Geertz, 1994) of the findings are credible. Since discourse analysis methodology involves looking at the data through multiple perspectives, validity is “a matter of how the transcript works together with all the other elements of the analysis to create a ‘trustworthy’ analysis” (Gee, 1999, p. 88).
In an ethnographic study the researcher is the human instrument telling the story. As such, there is a definite potential of researcher bias. Since it is impossible to remove biases, “it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). In light of this recommendation, I need to explain the various perspectives I held during this study.

As I was the third-grade teacher at this school, I needed to consider my role as observer. As a researcher, participant, colleague, friend, and teacher to the participants, I utilized both the insider and outsider perspectives while conducting this study. As recent researchers have stated, the position of insider/outsider is not a fixed identity but rather changeable as the researcher’s notion of self and her relationship to the participants shapes and reshapes itself continually (DeAndrade, 2000; Del Casino, 2001). Therefore during my research I was not an outsider or an insider, but I was constantly moving in and out of both perspectives. Each of these lenses has a different set of potential negative and positive aspects. An insider enjoys the trust of the participants and an understanding of the environment. An outsider can provide a fresh look at a culture because she brings varied experiences and perspectives to the study.

I was an insider to the community of the school where the study occurred because I also taught in the building thereby knowing and participating in the professional and social climate of the school. I fulfilled multiple roles as a colleague to the teacher in the study and as a teacher to the students. As a participating observer, I conferred with students during writing time and in that aspect, participated in the types of dialogue that occurred while conferencing. Having taught the Kid Writing (Feldgus & Cardonick,
1999) curriculum to these students in kindergarten, I was an insider to the pedagogical practices of the program.

Both inside and outside perspectives are necessary and can exist simultaneously. “Insider/outsider positions are socially constructed and entail a high level of fluidity that further impacts a research situation” (Eppley, 2006, para. 11). Because I was an insider, I was trusted and accepted into the classroom by the teacher and students. I already had an established rapport with the participants of the study. When I was analyzing the data from the writing conferences and interviews, I tried to step back and view the data as an outsider. Although I had an inside view of the curriculum and the school community, I also had the ethnographer’s responsibility to gather data and tell an unbiased story.

The tension between the insider-outsider perspectives in conducting an ethnographic research is necessary. Research is not conducted solely through the lens of the insider or the outsider. Instead, it is necessary to move on a continuum between these two aspects so that the researcher can better collect, observe, and analyze the data (Eppley, 2006). The important issue is that the researcher understands which lens she is using so that it can be identified as it shapes the data outcomes of the research.

**Conclusion**

This story of a second-grade teacher and her students during writing instruction in the classroom setting was recorded and analyzed using the tools of a microethnographer. In this chapter, I first described the site where this study occurred noting its culture and demographics. Next, I supported the decision to utilize an ethnographic research design specifically a microethnography. Third, this phenomenon was studied by collecting and
analyzing talk data from writing instruction and from interviews of the participants. I revealed my relationship to the research participants so that any biases were uncovered. In summary, this chapter detailed the research design, the methods of data collection and analyses, plus a description of the site.

In the next chapter I will introduce the teacher and students who participated in this study. Realizing that composing text is not an isolated event, it is vital to understand who the teacher is and how she orchestrates learning to write in her classroom. Also since students write from their lived experiences, it is important to know about them as individuals to better understand their roles in learning to write during writing workshop.
Chapter 4

Meet the Participants

In this chapter I introduce the students and teacher who worked with me during this study. The small group of Ms. Newman’s students who participated includes Albert, Bob, Carmen, Eric, Sharon, and Tailyn. (All names are pseudonyms.) These vignettes will paint a picture of each participant so that when they are mentioned in the analyses chapters, you will be able to visualize them in the situation described.

Meet Ms. Newman

Ms. Newman is an expert teacher who has been in the classroom for more than 10 years at the time of this study. As an expert teacher she is knowledgeable, experienced, and confident in her abilities as well as engaged in ongoing professional development.

Ms Newman has a good rapport with the students. She interacts with them as soon as they enter the room. She shows interest in them personally as well as educationally (field notes, June 1, 2006). When a child requested to do an activity or read a special book, she responded by asking the child to write a reminder note and hang it on the door so she would remember to fulfill her promise.

During whole-group math or writing lessons, Ms. Newman takes the role of facilitator; guiding the students to the correct answer by restating what has been said or by making connections so the student better understands the concept (Eodice, 1998; Haneda & Wells, 2000). For example, during a writing lesson, she included Eric’s name in the sentence to be edited hoping that he would then catch the mistake of a name that
hadn’t been capitalized (field notes, March 6, 2006). Ms. Newman relies on the classroom community to come to a consensus (Wells, 2000) while correcting morning math, the seatwork page that the students complete after arriving to school. After a student has given the answer, she writes it on the overhead projector. Then the students discuss the answer stating if they agree or disagree (field notes, June 1, 2006). One of Ms. Newman’s roles as the teacher is to allow the students’ interests and academic needs to guide her instruction. She notes the direction that the students are headed in their inquiry; and then through questioning and restating strategies she assists the students in finding the answers.

Ms. Newman’s emphasis on cooperation is evident in the community atmosphere of the classroom. Before school, students, parents, and teacher interact by talking and helping one another. When a student lost her water bottle, others helped her to find it. When it was time to move to the rug for group discussion, the students quietly and efficiently took their places. If the noise level became too loud, Ms. Newman would ask them “that it be like a library in the room.” Ms. Newman conducted the management of the classroom with a quiet, yet firm, voice; an understanding spirit; and a sense of respect for all the students (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991; Graves, 1994). The students responded by taking ownership within the classroom for themselves and others and by respectfully participating in the activities (field notes, June 1, 2006).

Ms. Newman has a print-rich classroom utilizing the students’ work (Harste et al., 1984). As she states, “That’s why you see their art work around. And their charts…everything that is up is there to help them to be better students or be stronger students” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 62). Ms. Newman’s
classroom is an environmental resource for the children as they write and learn. There are word walls for literacy and math, alphabet and number line references, and posters to remind the children about their responsibilities in a community of learners (Appendix F). Books and supplies are at easy access. These all provide demonstrations for students as they learn to read and write (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991).

Ms. Newman is not only an elementary teacher, but also a doctoral student and a mother of three grown children. Family is very important to her, and she visits her extended family whenever possible. In her free time she loves to read and go to the beach. Ms. Newman stays in shape by running and exercising. She is an enthusiastic person who enjoys teaching children, being with family, and lifelong learning.

**Ms. Newman’s Philosophy and Practices**

According to Braithwaite (1999) a teacher’s beliefs influence the way that she teaches and the environment that she creates. A complex interaction of philosophical beliefs and the teaching-learning situation influence the pedagogical practices of the teacher. Braithwaite continues by stating that student success is founded on the teacher’s understanding of where she needs to go to help her students increase their literacy skills. It does matter what teachers think because teaching is cognitively and attitudinally demanding and the beliefs of the teacher do affect student outcome.

Ms. Newman states, “I know the general skills that I would like them all to acquire during the year. My ‘knowledge’ of what I want the students to learn/know comes directly from the *Kid Writing* curriculum” (Ms. Newman, personal communication, June 12, 2007). She continues to clarify by saying, “knowledge, to me,
means having a clear understanding/picture of what I want the children to learn during the time they are in my class” (Ms. Newman, personal communication, June 12, 2007). Knowledge of content and her students guides Ms. Newman’s pedagogical approach which aligns with the psycho-linguistic model of writing instruction.

Taylor’s (1986) socio-linguistic research concerning early literacy practices states that the environment should be one in which children can discover literacy principles while the teacher explicitly discusses the attributes with the children. Ms. Newman realizes the importance of language and community which aligns with the socio-linguistic model of writing instruction. Ms. Newman says, “having that knowledge and knowing where to steer them next to accomplish the Kid Writing steps (and meet the standards) is the whole picture of a teacher's knowledge” (Ms. Newman, personal communication, June 12, 2007). Ms. Newman’s students explore literacy under her guidance and purposeful direction which also matches the psycho-linguistic writing model.

Ms. Newman understands that her role is to teach school discourse so children can be successful in literacy practices as defined by the school. She immerses the students with print from the beginning of the school year (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991; Harste et al., 1984).

Writing was a way to communicate…so we started off with messages even and labeling pictures and things like that. So they [the children] would start to identify their drawings or they’d identify a way to take home a message to families and that communication would come back, and then you’d build on that and then start looking at poetry and all different forms of literacy to show them that they too can be an author. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 48)

“There’s a certain amount of material that I want to cover and my expectations are high, but I want them to find their comfortable niche within this classroom so that they can meet those expectations and feel successful” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23,
Ms. Newman’s high standards and positive expectations prepare the class environment for successful literacy learning to occur (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991). Some ways that Ms. Newman introduces the students to school discourse are by having them write reports and design grading rubrics. She also stresses such concepts as plagiarism.

One reason I teach plagiarism is because I want them to know that they cannot simply copy chunks of text as part of their research. The recording paper I use was...purposefully designed with small sections so that students write key points and don't fill it with copied text. (Ms. Newman, personal communication, August 20, 2007)

Teaching about plagiarism is not only a writing skill but it is also a personal and academic understanding. Ms. Newman remembers one discussion from the beginning of the year. Carla, a second grader,

...gave an example of how someone plagiarized her dad on a paper. She emphasized it is wrong because this student ‘was acting like they wrote this when really it was her dad and that's not fair, cause he's the author not them - it's like stealing words.’ (Ms. Newman, personal communication, August 20, 2007)

Writing reports is very different from writing journal entries which are based on personal experiences. For that reason it is important to teach the concept of plagiarism. Non-fiction writing will continue to become an important school writing genre as the students progress to higher grades. By teaching these structural knowledge concepts within the context of students’ experiences (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991), the students can bridge the personal knowledge with school discourse.
Ms. Newman’s Student-centered Practices

Ms. Newman’s student-centered practices align with the psycho-linguistic writing model of instruction because she emphasizes both the student’s interests and the teacher’s knowledge of skills to be taught.

In the back of my mind I know what I want to teach and when I hear them [students] talk about what interests them, what motivates them, then I use that to get across what it is that I’m trying to teach. So that I’m following their lead by using what interests them but I’m still doing the teaching that I know needs to be done. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 86)

Student success lies in the fact that the teacher knows where she needs to go educationally and leads them to reach that literacy knowledge successfully (Braithwaite, 1999).

Ms. Newman believes that her classroom belongs to the students so she decorates it with them in mind.

When I start the beginning of the year, there’s not a lot on the wall, and I tend to put things up there that they’ve generated an interest in, and then beyond that I look for things that they need as references. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 78)

The decorations and posters are the students’ handiwork and for the students’ use (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991). She believes that when students are ready to internalize facts, they will do just that, so she does not teach isolated skills but consistently reviews concepts in context. This is evident in her writing instruction when she uses adult writing because she states, “When they’re ready to internalize that adult writing (that word that we’ve written there), then they will carry it over on their own; but it takes awhile sometimes with most words” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 10). Accepting students’ approximations provides an environment conducive to literacy learning (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991).
Meeting children’s creative and emotional needs as well as their educational ones is important to Ms. Newman (Cohen, 2001). Aligning with Dyson (1989) Ms. Newman states, “I like that they can draw a picture to generate an idea because I think it’s really hard for them to sit down and write every single day” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 32). Ms. Newman is conscious of how the students feel about themselves. As with the psycho-linguistic writing model, she teaches them about varied forms of writing and how each is important, so that “it feeds into that success that we want them [students] to feel every day” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 28). She realizes that every year is different and every child is different so she has to figure out what works for each child which aligns with the expressionist writing model (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 66).

Ms. Newman teaches to the students’ needs and expects each one to react differently. “Knowledge is knowing each student's ability…and where they are on the continuum so you can monitor their growth. Truth is a child may be considered quite low on the continuum but has demonstrated significant growth over time” (Ms. Newman, personal communication, June 12, 2007). Ms. Newman is focused on teaching to the needs of each student and moving them along the continuum of learning knowing that there are skills that each student must learn through purposeful language as utilized in the psycho-linguistic model.

Tension exists between having a set body of knowledge that needs to be taught and teaching to the needs of the child. Although Ms. Newman teaches the content of skills as is evident in writing, she expects the children to assimilate the knowledge when
they are ready (Piaget, 1926). Ms. Newman does not allow the body of knowledge to control her instruction, rather she allows the student’s needs to direct her teaching.

**Meet the Students**

Albert, Bob, Carmen, Eric, Sharon, and Tailyn are at various levels of writing ability and interest. Table 2 gives a quick overview of their interests as a group.

**Table 2. An Overview of the Student Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>WRITING INTERESTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rewriting movies, writing directions, school, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Baseball, wrestling, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Family, school, TV shows, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Video games, Star Wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dogs, family, TV shows, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailyn</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dinosaurs, fantasy and fiction stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meet Albert**

Albert is a precocious, talkative, 7-year-old second grader. He loves to rewrite movie plots and directions for hooking up computer play station games. He is very detailed in his writing. Not only is he a writer and a reader, but he is also a sports lover and an avid fan of the Penn State football team.

Writing is important to Albert because, “when you do it on a test, if you don’t write, then you don’t get any points…and if there is a really important message that I had to write to someone, if you didn’t write it then they wouldn’t find out” (Albert, interview,
June 1, 2006, lines 4, 6). To Albert, writing is a way to communicate, as he mentioned that “how people in old times made writing…was really cool” (line 24). Without this long ago invention of the alphabet, Albert would feel that he couldn’t communicate as effectively. Albert is an avid reader; and when I asked what makes a good piece of writing he said,

I think that if it was like a movie or a book like the *Chronicles of Narnia* I think it’s good how the authors made up this world…I mean if it were like copied off a real place, then it would just be like a town or something…but C.S. Lewis made it like a magical world. (lines 34, 38)

When Albert reads his own writing, he feels “like wow, I did this good work. And it makes me feel good about how good I wrote” (line 42). A good piece of writing is stimulating, as he relates “something exciting happens like *Lord of the Rings*…like wow there’s a war going to be here soon, there’s a new orc coming” (line 44). Albert has made a reading and writing connection in his life. He believes he is a writer and enjoys reading and writing exciting stories.

Reading, writing, and vocabulary are an integral part of Albert’s home life. Albert’s mother says that he writes letters and stories on the computer, reads fantasy and sports books regularly, and plays word games with his family at the dinner table. “He has a great imagination; he likes to play football, but he plays by himself” (Albert’s Mother, interview, June 13, 2006, line 124). Albert uses his creative imagination not only in play but also in writing. When Albert is writing one story in his journal and he wants to stop for a time to write on another topic, he writes, “Warning! We stop this story to write about…” During his battle story between the girls and the boys at recess, Albert explains how the fighting happens. “Then both sides fired the water guns and water cannons. Then the way people die is they freeze because the water is so cold” (Albert, journal, March
Albert’s Mother ended her interview by stating that, “he probably has written more detailed stories because the classroom environment encourages that” (Albert’s Mother, interview, June 13, 2006, line 206). Albert channels his ideas from reading and video games into his stories.

**Meet Bob**

Bob sits quietly working on his writing, yet he is attuned to the conversations around him. He often gives his peers positive comments about their writings. He once said to Albert, “I’ve been listening. It’s pretty good…a lot of detail” (Albert, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 111, 113). Bob enjoys writing about cartoons, his family, and baseball. When this 7-year-old boy speaks, he is polite and funny.

Bob is a writer who “write[s] about what I’m obsessed with like the week end…video games and stuff [so] it gets out of my system” (Bob, interview, June 6, 2006, lines 6, 14). Bob is driven to write when he is excited about a topic, otherwise he is a hesitant writer because “sometimes my arms get really tired and…my hand feels really bad and sometimes I get really bad aches” (line 32). Although Bob is not enthusiastic about writing, when he is obsessed about a topic he will write. At home he occasionally writes captions for his drawings and his Mother encourages him to write letters (Bob’s Mother, interview, June 12, 2006, lines 6, 8). Bob likes to write reminders on the family calendar and e-mails (lines 20, 34). Bob is a middle child, and according to his Mother he is a very obliging young man who wants to please others so he can often be encouraged to write both at home and at school (Bob’s Mother, interview, June 12, 2006, lines 6, 8, 94).
Dinner time is an important event in Bob’s family. Interesting articles in the local newspaper are cut out and discussed. Over dinner there is a ritual that everyone in the family gets to share about the day, their feelings, or opinions about a topic. Bob enjoys talking about his day, especially when the topic is baseball (Bob’s Mother, interview, June 12, 2006, lines 58, 64, 66). The family desires to hear from each child during the evening meal so that storytelling about the day’s events is an integral part of family life. Bob does not read books very often, but he does enjoy magazines such as *Sport’s Illustrated* and *Nickelodeon* (Bob’s Mother, interview, June 12, 2006, lines 46, 48). Bob feels that writing is good if it is fictional, “I like writing fiction stories…cause people can do anything they want” (Bob, interview, June 6, 2006, lines 34, 36). Bob does have the ability to create rich descriptions when he desires. He once wrote, “Have you ever had something so sour your tongue started to bleed?” (Bob, journal, May 2, 2006). Bob does not willingly choose to read and write, but he participates in these events because those around him value literacy activities.

Bob loves to play baseball, ride his bike, and wrestle. Bob’s Mother commented, “He’s very physical; he’s athletic and very coordinated. Gross motor skills have been advanced since the beginning” (Bob’s Mother, interview, June 12, 2006, line 80). Bob wants to please others as is evident in why he writes, “because people really enjoy my stories” (Bob, interview, June 6, 2006, line 148). Bob tries to make himself and others in his life happy with his actions and words.
Meet Carmen

Carmen is a quiet 7-year-old second grader. Observations reveal that she strives to please those around her, and she puts much effort into her writing and schoolwork. This young girl is helpful and pleasant to all her classmates.

Carmen feels writing is important “because if you don’t know what to write, then you can’t send a letter; it won’t say anything” (Carmen, interview, June 1, 2006, line 2). Carmen states that writing is “fun sometimes. You can learn from writing” (line 4). She also says, “I like writing because if your brain is not working and you write, then your brain starts to work. Writing gets me thinking” (line 10). Although Carmen states, “I write simple things like about my favorite shows and what I did in school,” sometimes she has problems deciding what to write (line 8). Hardworking Carmen writes during writing workshop trying to utilize all the editing strategies she has been taught to jump-start her brain. Once she wrote, “Hi! This is Carmen again and yes I am not going to draw a picture any today. I still don’t know what to write. It is so annoying. I don’t know why” (Carmen, journal, April 25, 2006). To Carmen the process of just writing is important, but she still worries about the content of the text.

Carmen’s Mother chose not to participate in the parent interview because the family was in the midst of some stressful situations at that time. I know Carmen and her Mother well enough from interactions that I can share general facts about the family. Carmen’s Mother enjoys cooking, and Carmen often helps her bake cookies for school snack. Carmen enjoys celebrating birthdays, and this year her Mother’s birthday was near Mother’s Day so that weekend would be doubly special. “My mom gets a two-o, that is what my mom says” (Carmen, conference, May 11, 2006, lines 176).
Family is very important to Carmen as she chose a journal entry about an animal family as her favorite story to share with me during our interview (Carmen, interview, June 1, 2006). She mixed fantasy and facts in this March 20\textsuperscript{th} (2006) journal entry about an animal family. She chose her siblings’ favorite animals and named them after her family members. She also drew pictures to go with her story. Although each character had an age, Carmen informed me that they were not the correct ages of her siblings. Carmen enjoys writing about school and family.

Meet Eric

Eric is a second grader who loves to talk about the video games that he plays at home. He enjoys making people laugh with his antics of making funny faces or drawing amusing cartoons. He is a very talented 7-year-old artist who draws characters with lots of details. Although he talks at-length about his writing plans, he rarely writes much during writing workshop. He often daydreams or spends his time drawing intricate cartoons.

Eric was very quiet during my interview with him. When talking with him, he rarely looked at me. When asked the importance or purpose of writing, he just answered, “I don’t know” (Eric, interview, June 1, 2006, lines 2, 4, 8). Eric states, “I am not used to writing and I don’t ever write” (lines 10, 12). While the other students filled many journals throughout the school year, Eric didn’t complete even one journal. Eric loves to talk in detail about the video games which he plays, and he enjoys drawing intricate pictures portraying these games; but when it comes to writing about his passion, he is reluctant.
Eric’s Mother reads books, such as those of Shel Silverstein, with him. She reads a page and then Eric reads a page, but “he’s disgruntled when I make him pick up this or that” and ask him to read (Eric’s Mother, interview, June 19, 2006, line 58). “As soon as he starts talking or reading, it’s a monotone like I don’t want to do this, or I’m bored with this” (lines 68, 70). His Mother is trying to get Eric to read more, but she feels that he doesn’t like “kid’s stuff.” Although Eric usually doesn’t like to read children’s books, he did enjoy a college chemistry book which he found. He also would rather read National Geographic than Highlights for Children (lines 74, 80).

According to his Mother, Eric enjoys playing video games, swimming, and walking in the park or the mountains with his Dad (Eric’s Mother, interview, June 19, 2006, lines 172, 174). Eric’s Dad spends time outdoors with him, and his Mother models literacy habits by reading and writing in the home. It seems as though Eric has diverse home experiences, yet he always chooses to talk, write, and draw about video games. According to Eric, “I am interested in video games [because] I like violence and stuff like that (Eric, interview, June 1, 2006, line 8). Eric has experiences from which to draw upon for writing, but chooses to limit his writing to a few sentences about video games.

**Meet Sharon**

Sharon is an energetic, 8-year-old second grader. She always has a smile on her face. Often during conference time when the teacher would be explaining how to spell a word or a grammar aspect, Sharon would smile and say, “I forgot that” (Sharon, conference, April 25, 2006, line 232) or “I was so close though” (Sharon, conference, May 4, 2006, line 61). Her favorite topics to talk about are dolphins and country music.
In first grade she was the resident expert on dolphin knowledge. When Sharon grows up, she wants to be a dolphin-trainer or a dirt bike stunt rider (Sharon’s Mother, interview, June 14, 2006, line 122).

Sharon’s Mother stated that Sharon writes notes to her sister and aunt and keeps a journal which she writes in daily (Sharon’s Mother, interview, June 14, 2006, lines 26-34). When I asked Sharon why writing is important she responded, “I just like to do it, and it’s fun” (Sharon, interview, June 1, 2006, line 2). Sharon also writes because it “help[s] me spell” (line 6). Sharon has trouble with letter and sound connections, so spelling is difficult for her; therefore she views writing as a way to improve her spelling.

Sharon writes “stories of school sometimes, and at home my Mom writes something on my chalkboard, and I have to copy it on a piece of paper” (Sharon, interview, June 1, 2006, line 12). Sharon’s Mother stated, “Every night I write a paragraph on the chalkboard, and I make her practice her handwriting” (Sharon’s Mother, interview, June 14, 2006, line 4). Sharon enjoys writing and usually has no problem deciding topics to write in her journal. “I just use characters in all of them” because that is what makes a good story (Sharon, interview, June 1, 2006, line 22). But when she reads to Ms. Newman during conference time, she sometimes can’t read her own words because her spelling is not conventional (Sharon, conference, April 25, 2006, line 220).

Sharon enjoys writing about her favorite TV shows and her pet dogs. One entry stated: “I have two dogs. Their names are Ginger and Nilla. I hate Ginger. Nilla can talk. And that’s all” (Sharon, journal, June 1, 2006). When I asked Sharon how her dog talks, she told me that when she asks Nilla a question, the dog barks and that is how she talks (Sharon, interview, June 1, 2006, line 36). The activity of thinking of an interesting event
and just writing about it is fun to Sharon, but the process of writing the words on the paper is difficult for her. Sharon is a happy and willing writer.

Meet Tailyn

Tailyn is an 8-year-old second grader who reveals a determined and positive attitude about school. Her creative nature is often seen in her very long and meandering stories that actually resolve the story plot she has designed.

When I asked Tailyn why writing is important, she answered, “So we can get better at writing” (Tailyn, interview, May 30, 2006, line 8). Tailyn enjoys writing because “we get to put our imagination on paper” (line 20). The length of a story is sometimes more important than the topic to Tailyn. “Well, one time I wrote about the whole entire same thing, and now I’m just writing about like different things like rabbit[s], hair cutting, flowers, ballet, and the beach” (lines 14, 16). Tailyn even organized one of her journals with a table of contents on the front cover which included titles and page numbers. Tailyn is a creative writer who writes so she can get better at it.

Tailyn’s creativity and imagination are evident at home also. Her Mother stated that Tailyn plays school with her younger twin sisters and enjoys reading to them, as well as reading to her Mother (Tailyn’s Mother, interview, September 29, 2006, lines 8, 10, 38). Tailyn reads everything in sight from picture books to her Mother’s Family Circle (line 36). Tailyn loves to retell stories adding details that make them hilarious (line 68). Since kindergarten Tailyn has wanted to be a paleontologist, so she devours books about dinosaurs (line 50). At home Tailyn uses her creative imagination with her family by reading, writing, telling stories, and playing with her sisters.
Tailyn is a leader whether she is teaching her twin sisters at playing school or telling her mother a story to be written down. She loves to display her knowledge about movies and dinosaurs by asking questions of her Mother who can’t trick Tailyn by lying (Tailyn’s Mother, interview, September 29, 2006, line 44). Tailyn gets ideas from her experiences for writing stories, but she says “whenever I can’t think of anything I’ll write what I think” (Tailyn, interview, May 30, 2006, line 248). Tailyn is never at a loss for words when it comes to writing.

**Conclusion**

Although these six students represent only a selection of Ms. Newman’s class, they do symbolize the uniqueness that she values in each of her students. Each child has their own interests, strengths, and experiences; and Ms. Newman attempts to know each student well so that she can teach them in ways that build on these areas. The classroom is their community where she has been given the privilege to teach them for one year. Ms. Newman believes that it is her responsibility to meet the individual needs of each student in a community setting, as she opens the world of writing to them.

Ms. Newman believes that it is vital to possess knowledge of the content to be taught and the students who are learning that content. She also believes that it is the teacher’s responsibility to prepare the atmosphere for learning and to build class community for productive writing. Ms. Newman utilizes a variety of writing models as she interacts with her students. She starts with the importance of the student as the expressionist models does. She relies on the importance of social interaction during
learning as the socio-linguistic model encourages. Finally, Ms. Newman uses purposeful language as promoted by the psycho-linguistic model of instruction.

This chapter not only introduced the participants of this study but also provided the philosophical foundation for Ms. Newman’s pedagogical practices. In the following chapters I will analyze the language that Ms. Newman uses to build relationships with her students so that she can conduct successful writing conferences. Chapter Five will describe how Ms. Newman uses her discursive practices to build relationships within the class community that are conducive to writing.
Chapter 5

Building Relationships: The Role of the Teacher’s Language

In this chapter I relate how Ms. Newman uses her language to build relationships within the community of writing workshop. Making use of language and discursive practices, she gets to know her students as she establishes positive rapport with them via demonstrations and conversations. She begins each individual writing conference by understanding the meaning of the text. Then, she strategically uses specific language structures to positively assist in co-constructing knowledge with the students. Finally, I discuss the sociocultural aspects of both the Kid Writing curriculum and Ms. Newman’s practices. Through both her language and discursive practices, Ms. Newman builds positive relationships while conferring with her students within a sociocultural perspective.

Ms. Newman walks around the room engaging students in conversation about their drawings to encourage them in their writing. She explains, “And if there are children talking and visiting with each other, I just kind of lend an ear to see if they [are] talking about their writing [or]…about their work” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 70). When students are off-task, she redirects them to drawing or talking about an interesting topic because, she says, “I want it to be something that they’re excited about and interested in and meaningful” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 8). Some students ask her to listen to a sentence to see if it sounds “good.” Others might ask her how to spell a word. The initial period of writing workshop is a chaotic yet important social activity that assists the students in focusing on writing.
After the students have been writing awhile, Ms. Newman asks, “Is anyone ready for adult writing?” The answer to that question informs her that a student wants a conference. Ms. Newman allows the students to decide when they are ready to share their writing with her. She likes “conferencing because you get to hear so much feedback in what they are thinking” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 32). At the beginning of an individual conference, she asks the student to read the story out loud while she listens and follows along in the text. Then she responds with an overall positive comment or a question seeking more information concerning the text because Ms. Newman’s first goal is to “hear what they’re saying in their writing [and ask] does that make sense?” (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 40). Understanding meaning is a necessary foundation for co-constructive editing.

Writing workshop is a social activity that prepares and supports students during the writing process. Since writing is an individual act within a social context (Brodkey, 1996; Street, 1995), creating a collaborative community that supports the construction of meaning is vital. The teacher has the responsibility to meet both the cognitive and the affective needs of the students in the writing community (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). The writing community includes building relationships so that the students and teacher can interact in multiple ways to construct texts and make meaning (Tobin, 1993).

This chapter describes how Ms. Newman uses her discursive practices to create an environment that is conducive to writing. Her use of language structures and gestures enhance the content of the words she uses. Based on the needs of the students, Ms. Newman uses her language and discursive practices to build a relationship with them so that they can grow as writers. The student is the expert on the content of his text, while
Ms. Newman is the reader who wants to learn about the student. Ms. Newman ensures that conference time is a collaborative event where knowledge is co-constructed among novice and expert learners.

How does the teacher use language to build relationships during writing workshop? First, Ms. Newman utilizes her discursive practices to complement her language use. Second, she builds strong relationships with her students by knowing her students and establishing positive rapport through thinking out loud and conversations. Third, she establishes the meaning of the text to provide the foundation for co-construction. Finally, Ms. Newman shares her voice by strategically using language structures such as pronouns and modals to share power and promote agency. Establishing supportive relationships in a collaborative community is essential to creating positive and successful writing conferences.

A Collaborative Community

Although there are many influences on the classroom (students, parents, community, state, etc.), the teacher is the person who pragmatically decides how to orchestrate those influences (Fraatz, 1987). Ultimately the teacher can have an important role to play in the classroom as she uses her discourse to design a learning community conducive to writing instruction in her role as expert in the collaborative community (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). This collaborative setting affords interactive dialogue among the students and with the teacher.

The emphasis of this study is on the role that teacher talk plays in building relationships within the collaborative community of writing workshop. A collaborative
community affords students the “opportunity to make their own sense of the learning opportunities that are presented to them and to do so in collaborative interaction with their peers and with others more knowledgeable than themselves” (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 28). From a sociocultural perspective, the teacher intervenes so that she can create dialogue in which meaning can be co-constructed by teacher and student. Therefore her responsibility is her language choice: what to say, when and how to speak, whether to nudge, whether to intervene or be silent.

**Discursive Practices and Co-construction of Knowledge**

Language (in the form of speech, text, gestures, or images) is an instrument used to communicate and construct meaning (Dyson, 1989; Kress, 1999). Both the teacher and the student use verbal and written language along with extralinguistic features such as gestures and non-linguistic features such as images to communicate and construct knowledge during writing conference time. During writing workshop, the student first writes a text and possibly draws a picture, and then he discusses the entry with the teacher. Together, they explore and elaborate meaning within the social reality of the writing workshop. Ms. Newman states, “It is so important to use encouraging words to foster a continued interest in the writing process” (Ms. Newman, personal communication, July 30, 2007; Calkins, et al, 2005; Johnston, 2004). The following excerpt reveals how Ms. Newman uses both her language and her discursive practices to co-construct meaning.

311. **Ms. Newman:** Okay, here we go. ((kneeling beside Bob and puts arm on his chair around him))
While conferring with Bob, Ms. Newman uses her language in the form of a question to clarify meaning with him (line 313) and her gestures (lines 311-313) to support and encourage him. Ms. Newman prepares the atmosphere for conferring by kneeling beside Bob and by attentively listening as he reads.

Such discursive practices as the physical actions or movements of the teacher which occur while talking can encourage and positively support students. For example, Ms. Newman performed a variety of gestures during her interactions with the students. She always knelt or sat beside the students attentively listening to them read their journal entry while nodding her head at various times. Whenever she interacted with students, she gave them her undivided attention and looked directly at them. Ms. Newman used hand motions to explain or clarify ideas as she talked to the students. While discussing the student’s story, Ms. Newman often pointed to the text with her hand or pencil. Ms. Newman’s gestures impacted her instruction by complementing the accompanying dialogue.

Gestures that draw students into discussions can help improve the learning environment (Gee, 1989; Johnston, 2004). When a teacher looks at the student while pointing to the text being discussed, the student is better able to focus on the instruction. When actions and words align, positive attention and direction are enhanced for the
students if they are interpreting the words and gestures in the same way that the teacher intended. The teacher’s language includes more than just the words she vocalizes. Her accompanying gestures can also affect the meaning of her dialogue.

Establishing Rapport with Students

Ms. Newman establishes rapport with her students in order to support them during writing. First, she observes and listens to learn about their interests. Second, she teaches the actions and knowledge that she desires them to learn by thinking out loud. Third, she converses with the students guiding them along into different writing experiences.

By Learning about the Student

In working with Eric, Ms. Newman needed to learn about him personally to help him grow as a writer. Listening to students talk about their text is one important step of conferring according to Murray (2000). Eric is a writer who spends most of his time drawing pictures and thinking about what he wants to write.

341. **Ms. Newman**: Oh, see I told you I don’t know these guys you do. Your drawings are just incredible. They’re so detailed.
342. **Eric**: Yeah they are.
343. **Ms. Newman**: They really are. Let’s look at the word really.
344. **Eric**: And I still have the whole entire book that without adult writing.
345. **Ms. Newman**: Really? From the beginning?
346. **Eric**: Yeah.

357. **Ms. Newman**: It looks just like him. You could tell me a little bit about this part. ((uses hand motions)) This part of what you like about all these characters. ((pointing)) Have all of these characters ever been in one movie? ((looks at student))
358. **Eric**: No. ((looking down in lap while thinking, then looks up but not at teacher))
Ms. Newman: If not? You could write about. I would like to see a movie that has all these characters ((pointing)) in it. You could tell me about what each one would do, maybe the plot of the movie? You could be really creative. You could write your own movie. ((hand motions, looks at student then at approaching student while Eric looks in the air and then at approaching student)) (Eric, conference, April 25, 2006, lines 341-346, 357-358, 365)

Writing workshop begins with an opportunity to draw as a way to organize one’s thoughts for writing. Eric realizes he is a good artist and usually spends most of his writing time drawing detailed pictures. Ms. Newman encourages him to write about the detail and knowledge that he possesses about his drawings (line 357, 365). Eric’s comment in Line 342 reveals that he perceives himself as an artist. When Ms. Newman starts to correct his spelling of really (line 343), Eric’s comment is that his journal is completely free of “adult writing.” Not only does Eric enjoy drawing more than writing, but he also does not want to make spelling errors. To Eric being a writer means composing perfect texts and making meaning through picture symbols.

Ms. Newman commented that there wasn’t a lot that motivated him so we had to talk about what things he was interested in and his response to that is often ‘nothing.’ So I had to become more of a listener. I’d listen when he talked to his peers, and I’d watch what books he took from the library and things like that. So that then I could go back to him and say, ‘well I heard you talking about whatever the case may be.’ (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 90)

Ms. Newman became an avid listener in order to help Eric find topics about which to write and to see himself as a writer.

After listening to and observing Eric in the classroom, Ms. Newman talked to him about the topics in which she knew he was interested, and they created a list of three ideas. Then Ms. Newman asked,
Okay, of those three things which one would you say would be something you could write about, you could expand on, or you could share a story?...A lot of times what kids don’t realize is that when they’re telling a story, if they just put that on paper, they can become a writer...He had a story about fireworks that he thought was really funny, so we turned that into a writing project. And he was able to see then that he could write. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 90)

By learning more about Eric, Ms. Newman helped Eric to compose a text about fireworks. Ms. Newman supported Eric’s artistic endeavors and built on them to move him toward writing. Knowing more about Eric was vital to moving Eric on the writing continuum of school discourse.

To meet both the cognitive and affective needs of the students, the teacher needs to build relationships (Tobin, 1993) while establishing a community (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). In Ms. Newman’s classroom there is a sense of responsibility and engagement as the students take on the jobs of an author by choosing topics, drawing, researching, discussing and writing (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991). There is a positive sense of accomplishment as Ms. Newman expects the students to succeed and be productive writers, although that is “different for every child, but in some way they are building their writing skills; no matter where they are” (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 84). Ms. Newman provides responses to the students as they write which supports them while building the community of writers. When students feel a sense of worth and ownership, they are more prepared for learning (Gore, 2005; Kaufman, 2006).

**By Thinking Out Loud for the Student**

Ms. Newman often speaks her thinking out loud regarding the actions that she is performing or the actions that the student has performed. In this way, she is providing
information to the student to help in his learning. This action of performing demonstrations (Cambourne & Turbill, 1991) occurs through conversations and thinking aloud. Overt talk about text during a literacy activity is extremely important because it makes available the mental workings of the process (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Understanding what is happening during an activity builds the teacher’s relationship with the student. The teacher can connect information about the student to the writing experience.

In the following excerpt Ms. Newman demonstrates her thinking as she includes Bob in the editing process.

315. **Ms. Newman:** …Let’s look at *I like cartoons.* Do you hear that ((looks at the student and uses fingers to show small chunk size)) chunk at the beginning of *cartoons*? What, what chunk do you hear?
316. **Bob:** car ((looks at text))
317. **Ms. Newman:** Son, this ((points to text and looks at Bob)) is what you are to your dad. You’re his son, Right? ((Bob nods while continuing to look at text)) So we need to add an extra o to get soon. ((writes soon)) (Bob, conference, April 25, 2006, lines 315-317)

While conferring with Bob, Ms. Newman looked at him as she began talking. First, the teacher involved Bob in the correct spelling of *cartoons* by asking him to spell the chunk that he hears (line 315). Bob had written *cretoons*, but through conversation she helped him to discover the correct chunk that he needed. When Bob wrote the word *son* instead of *soon*, Ms. Newman explained each word and pointed to the text so he would understand why she was adding another *o* to the word in his text (line 317). She mentioned Bob’s family and his relationship to his father to personalize the discussion of the word *son*. Ms. Newman continued to involve Bob in the learning process while thinking aloud so that he had a better understanding of the writing process and the spelling of the words discussed. Ms. Newman was demonstrating through her thinking
aloud how to process the editing strategies she was employing. In this way Bob was participating with her in the learning and thinking process and supporting him as an active participant of the writing community.

**By Conversing with the Student**

Ms. Newman uses conversation to help her form relationships which will make writing more productive for each student (Tobin, 1993). How teachers feel and act toward students affect how the students react to their writing: the problems and the possibilities (Tobin, 2000). Through conversations the teacher can not only build relationships to help the student but through those relationships students can view themselves as better writers. In a collaborative community the social interaction can provide the positive atmosphere for building relationships.

As Ms. Newman explained that Albert was a very articulate writer, and at the beginning of the year “he would fill pages with the stories of Harry Potter, but he would do it verbatim.” Ms. Newman talked to him to say that J.K. Rowling was really the author of that story. She asked him, “What kind of stories could you come up with on your own where you, Albert, would be the author?” So it was important for Ms. Newman to build a relationship with Albert so that she could challenge him to produce his own stories. At first Albert continued to write Harry Potter ‘type’ stories, by just changing character names and scenes. It was still very scripted by the originals. So we [teacher and Albert] talked at length about what kinds of things interested him, what kinds of things he liked to do, go to, talk about, etc. That led us to Penn State football and he began to write detailed football stories [with] players as characters and games as the story. At first tentative[ly], but then feeling more confident (because I acknowledged his ownership and originality); he was something of a commentator but he was beginning to grasp the idea of writing his own story with great descriptors and
varied scenarios… He got more creative and wrote about aliens and their ‘adventures.’ He loved labeling the sections by Chapter and was able to share this idea with his peers. (Ms. Newman, personal communication, August 24, 2007)

Ms. Newman felt that it was necessary to “push him to the next level…because if he wasn’t he would still be reciting stories that he read rather than creating his own” (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 100). Ms. Newman believed in Albert’s writing ability and saw the possibilities which she discussed with him. Ms. Newman’s actions and support of Albert affected his writing (Tobin, 2000).

Discussion affords collaborative construction of knowledge as the teacher guides the student through conversation to construct knowledge with her. By observing and listening Ms. Newman learned about Eric so that she could support him in the writing process. By thinking out loud the teacher is able to demonstrate her thoughts and thus provide a knowledge base for the students as she did for Bob. By conversing with students like Albert, she is able to verbalize ideas that will help him to construct a story that he created. By observing, listening, and conversing with students Ms. Newman establishes a positive rapport to build a collaborative community where she is able to demonstrate strategies that will enable her students to engage in successful writing.

Establishing the Meaning of the Text

One important aspect of conferring with students is to understand the meaning of the text as this text represents the student’s experience (Murray, 1982; Smith, 1982). This understanding is the foundation for editing because meaning needs to be explored before writing conventions are corrected. Ms. Newman always began conferences by asking
students to read their journal entry. She then asked informative clarifying questions if she was unclear about the text as she did with Bob.

245. **Ms. Newman:** Slugger, now slugger is that a logo? ((looks at student using hand motions)) Do you know what I mean? Is that a, is that a symbol? A baseball symbol? ((student rolls eyes while thinking))
246. **Bob:** It means you like hit a lot like.
247. **Ms. Newman:** Okay, ((nodding)) so what I’m asking is, do you think that should be an uppercase S? or not necessarily?
248. **Bob:** S upper case. ((erases s and writes S))
249. **Ms. Newman:** Do you think it should be? Okay? ((nods yes)) If it’s like the title of a person, or a name, or a part of a logo, you might want it to be.

(Bob, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 245-249)

Before Ms. Newman could continue with the editing suggestions for Bob, she needed to understand what the word *slugger* meant to Bob. She looked at him and offered some choices of what she thought it might mean (line 245), and when Bob stated what *slugger* meant to him in Line 246, Ms. Newman responded both verbally and physically that she understood (line 247). Since Bob decided that it should be capitalized, the teacher proceeded to provide various reasons for using a capital letter (line 249). Ms. Newman’s editing suggestions were based on the student’s understanding, and then she provided the rules of capitalization by verbalizing while editing.

Sometimes clarifying the meaning of a word in the text involves more dialogue than just a few questions and comments as occurred in Bob’s situation. Carmen, for example, was writing about a television show called *Naruto*. She used the word *jitsu*, which was unfamiliar to Ms. Newman.

175. **Ms. Newman:** Okay, I don’t know what those things are. Can you tell me what they are?
176. **Carmen:** I can’t really explain it good.
177. **Ms. Newman:** Is it art work or is it like the ribbon gymnastics where you have ribbons? Is that what it is like it looks like that it might be ribbons? ((making ribbon motions with hands)) That you throw?
182. **Carmen:** No.
183. **Ms. Newman:** No?
184. **Carmen:** It’s like ((sitting back in her seat)) you make something that’s not there, you make it appear there.
185. **Ms. Newman:** Oh, so it’s kind of like magic a little bit. ((nodding head))
186. **Carmen:** Yeah. ((nods her head yes)) (Carmen, conference, April 25, 2006, lines 175-186)

In this conference the teacher used a series of questions (line 175, 177), gestures (line 177, 185), and comments (line 185) to ascertain Carmen’s meaning. When Ms. Newman began to understand, both her words and gestures revealed that to the student (line 185). As in these cases, understanding what the students mean in the text is the beginning of instruction during conference time. If the teacher does not understand the text, it will be difficult to lead the student toward making meaningful edits.

In establishing rapport within a community it is important to make sure one is understood whether in conversation or in reading a text. Knowing this, Ms. Newman strives to assure students that their meaning is important to her. She utilizes listening strategies and clarifying questions with hand motions to assist in meaning-making conversation. Useful edits can not be co-constructed if there is not a common understanding of the text.

**Sharing Knowledge: Whose Voice is Heard?**

“But look at that great self-editing. Aren’t you proud of yourself?” comments Ms. Newman to Carmen (Carmen, conference, May 2, 2006, line 317). Sentences such as these not only tell Carmen that she did a great job, but also what it is that she did and how she should feel about it. Certain language conventions such as the use of pronouns and modals are important in learning a new discourse and becoming part of the writing community. While sharing knowledge, whose voice is heard?
School is a specific institution with its own practices and language to be acquired (Gee, 1989; 2001). Since it is the teacher’s responsibility to teach and bridge to school discourse, making students feel part of the school community should be foundational. Also, multiple discourses are at work simultaneously so it is important for the teacher to listen and hear whose voice is speaking.

**Using Pronouns**

The following conference excerpt shows how Ms. Newman praised Carmen by using a certain pronoun in a question that emphasizes the student rather than the teacher so that the student’s voice was not silenced.

297. **Ms. Newman:** Okay, you know what I like? I can tell when I look at this story that you already went back through ((hand motions)) and did some self-editing, didn’t you? ((looks at student who is looking at the text)) You have a carat [notation for adding words]. You have a couple of words that you’ve crossed off because you didn’t feel like they needed to be there.

317. **Ms. Newman:** But look at that great self-editing! Aren’t you proud of yourself? There is one, two, three corrections that you went back and made, that made your writing sound better.

318. **Carmen:** Yeah, because I didn’t want it to be like, I don’t know what to write. (Carmen, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 297, 317-318)

During this conference Ms. Newman notices and names the editing strategies that Carmen has accomplished such as using a carat to indicate the addition of a word and crossing off unwanted words (line 297). The teacher uses the pronoun *you* to give ownership to the actions that Carmen has performed thus letting her voice be heard. Carmen’s success is built on the work she has done -- great self-editing -- as is evident in Ms. Newman’s language use to praise Carmen in line 317. She said “Aren’t you proud of yourself?” rather than “I am proud of you” which would put the emphasis on the teacher.
being proud. The writing and editing that Carmen has completed are her actions and therefore a reason to be proud. The teacher is noticing and naming the actions but the credit belongs to Carmen who has done the work. The editing strategies of using a carat and crossing off words are skills Carmen should be proud of utilizing.

When Ms. Newman verbalizes what Carmen has done in her journal writing, she is giving voice to Carmen’s actions. By hearing positive comments voiced from the student’s perspective, Carmen could feel empowered by those actions. She wanted people to know that she knew how to write because she used editing strategies (line 318).

Ms. Newman used pronouns to the advantage of establishing relationships during writing conferences. The three prominent pronouns she utilized were the first person plural (we and us), the first person singular (I), and the second person (you). There is a connection between language choice and what Ms. Newman was trying to accomplish during the writing conference (Johnston, 2004). By using the first person plural pronoun, we or let’s, Ms. Newman was including them in the discussion in order to build relationships and co-construct knowledge with the students. She was establishing a collaborative community (Graves, 1983; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992) and “providing children with the means and the desire to construct themselves as responsible literate…citizens” (Johnston, 2004, p. 80).

Another example of Ms. Newman’s relationship building was when Albert had approached Ms. Newman asking if his sentence sounded “good” because he thought that it might have been too long.

96. **Ms. Newman**: Yup, it sounds like a really long ((hand motion)) sentence. I’ll come over and we’ll look where we can maybe divide it up. ((picks up recorder and moves it to other table))

97. **Albert**: Okay ((teacher is walking to the next table))
98. Ms. Newman: The best way to do that now is for you to read through there, ((hand motion)) and ((kneels next to student)) any time you pause in the reading, that tells us that it’s probably a good place for a comma or a period. ((looks at student)) So as you read I’ll listen and you listen and we’ll figure out where it seems like a natural place for you to pause. (Albert, conference, May 4, 2006, lines 96-98)

When Ms. Newman begins to converse with Albert, she kneels next to him so that they are equals looking at his text. Ms. Newman’s response included the second person, you, along with a gesture to include Albert in the plan. As Albert read, both he and Ms. Newman listened; and together they decided where the natural pauses were and what punctuation was needed. The important aspect of Ms. Newman’s language is that she was not the possessor of the knowledge, but that punctuation would be determined together with the student. By utilizing the pronouns I, you, and we, Ms. Newman was sharing the voice and decision making power. Each participant has responsibilities. The student had to read the text while the student and teacher together listened to the text, and then decided together how to edit it.

The first person plural pronoun is an inclusive pronoun. Every time Ms. Newman used we she was actively involved with the student and the text. Ms. Newman also used we in conjunction with the second person pronoun so that the student had support with whatever she was asking him to do. For example, first she agreed with Albert that the sentence was too long (line 96). Next, she looked at Albert as she suggested a course of action (line 98). She then modeled a way to do that as they worked together reading it out loud and listening for the places to pause. Together they would decide how to punctuate the sentence based on the way Albert read his text. In other words, his meaning was the foundation of the editing choices and the decision making power was shared.
Through the use of pronouns Ms. Newman shared her voice and power within the community. With Carmen she used the pronoun *you* to give the ownership of the action to Carmen. She labeled her actions and through the conference empowered Carmen with the knowledge of being a writer and being proud of her editing abilities. By using *we* she actively involved Albert with his text. The teacher shared in the decision-making process giving Albert the power to decide about punctuation. “Learning communities are not simply about being supportive,…they also require challenge” to help each other out (Johnston, 2004, p. 65).

**Using Modals**

Ms. Newman not only uses pronouns to assist her in a collaborative writing conference, but she also uses a specific verb form of modals, for example, *could*. As Ms. Newman read Albert’s text, she felt that a word change would make the meaning clearer. So she presented this idea to Albert.

198. **Albert**: I’m gonna try to do then. ((writes then))
199. **Ms. Newman**: ((arm on back of student’s chair)) What if we don’t want anymore thens though? ((leans over looking at text)) I thought we were trying not to do any more thens.
200. **Albert**: ((looks at teacher)) Well maybe we could just try to squeeze that in, cause it pauses there, and we can’t do an and.
201. **Ms. Newman**: ((looks at student using hand motions)) Could we just say you will see and then tell them what you will see next? ((turns page)) Instead of putting then there, we’d say the other end of the plug that is in the wall you will see ((page turning)) another plug at the end of that plug.

(Albert, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 198-201)

During this conference the student and teacher are discussing the use of the word *then*. Albert wants to use it, but the teacher has reminded him that their editing goal is to not overuse the word *then* (lines 198-199). Albert wants to squeeze it in because *and* won’t
do (line 200). When the teacher gives her suggestion, she says, “Could we just say… and then we [would] say…” along with some hand motions. Ms. Newman is stating an idea for Albert to consider (leaving out the word *then*). This is a suggestion rather than a requirement. This conversation during conferencing is an example of sharing knowledge while editing. The student makes his suggestions and the teacher hers. By using modals the teacher is not utilizing the power of her position to sway the student to her editing choice.

This previous example displays another language structure that Ms. Newman utilized: the use of modals. Modals are used for a variety of reasons such as stating a degree of probability, expressing one’s attitude, or expressing politeness when making a request or giving advice (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). During a writing conference the teacher is helping the student to edit the text. Since the text belongs to the student, Ms. Newman respects that notion and uses words to suggest changes and provide possible advice about editing.

By using the modals *could* and *would*, Ms. Newman was offering possibilities for editorial changes in the text but leaving the choice to the student. Albert and Ms. Newman discussed many editorial changes in his piece concerning how to hook up a game cube to the computer. The following text is the continuation of Albert’s conference with Ms. Newman concerning the possible deletion of the overused word *then* from his text.

202. **Albert:** Well, I think that there, that wouldn’t make that much sense. ((looks at teacher then in the air and scrunches faces))
203. **Ms. Newman:** ((arm on student’s chair)) Okay? You like the then there? Okay. (Albert, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 200-203)
During this discussion, Ms. Newman positions herself next to Albert and places her arm on his chair. It seems like she is creating a private space with her actions so that she and Albert can make this important decision. Albert disagrees with the placement of the word because he felt that the meaning would be unclear without that word (line 202). Albert feels strongly enough in his choice, as well as comfortable enough with Ms. Newman, that he can disagree with her without feeling pressure to do it the teacher’s way. Ms. Newman is allowing the student a choice especially when it has to do with making the meaning of the text clear according to the student’s way of thinking.

By using modals Ms. Newman is advising the students of possible edits. When the editorial change is a choice or a possibility, the teacher uses modals of possibility like could and would, or modals of neutrality like could and might (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). During one conference Ms. Newman asked Tailyn to make a decision about a particular pronoun and then about using some punctuation to clarify the meaning of a word.

341. **Ms. Newman**: …Would we start a sentence…with me or would we start it with what?
342. **Tailyn**: Me is his name.
343. **Ms. Newman**: Okay? So then maybe we could do this, and then we’ll know if we put it in quotation marks. So that we know it’s something a little bit different. How about it? And since you did that, that helps. Doesn’t it?
344. **Tailyn**: Yes. (Tailyn, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 341-344)

At first Ms. Newman wanted Tailyn to consider using another pronoun since it was inappropriate to begin a sentence with me (line 341) so she used the modal would for the student to consider another choice. But she had misunderstood Tailyn’s meaning, that Me was a person’s name (line 342). In that case, the teacher used could to make the suggestion to use quotation marks to show “Me” as a person’s name. Throughout the
conference Ms. Newman used her language to help build a positive relationship as well as support the student in writing instruction.

Ms. Newman utilized language structures such as pronouns and modals to assist her in constructing knowledge with her students and sharing her voice. Her use of inclusive pronouns implied that writing conferences were times of working together to not only understand the meaning of the text but also to make the text sound smooth. When she had editing suggestions, Ms. Newman used modals in her polite requests. Through the use of modals, she was able to help students to understand the difference between necessary edits and edits which were suggestions. In doing so, she was building a positive relationship with each of the students. Ms. Newman not only shared her knowledge, she also shared her voice. She empowered Carmen by stating the proud action in her voice. She shared her voice with Albert by working with him in the decision making process. Ms. Newman utilized specific language structures along with gestures to make conference times a collaborative supportive event.

A Sociocultural Kid Writing Workshop in Ms. Newman’s Classroom

A sociocultural perspective acknowledges the importance of social interaction as an avenue to enhance learning. Learning is both social and contextual with language as a vehicle for making meaning. Ms. Newman believes that knowing the individual is vital to building the community wherein she is then able to instruct. The Kid Writing curriculum facilitates these ideas by centering writing instruction around the social interactions of the students and teacher. Ms. Newman also believes that using encouraging words promotes positive learning experiences and motivates students during writing workshop. The Kid
*Writing* curriculum supports this notion by accepting students’ approximations for writing via “kid writing” and building on the word knowledge that the students possess. Therefore, overall sociocultural beliefs are found in the *Kid Writing* curriculum and in Ms. Newman’s classroom which support building relationships.

In this chapter Ms. Newman used her language and discursive practices to build relationships with her students in order to foster writing growth. The *Kid Writing* program enables this relationship building. One way to develop a relationship with students is to talk with them. This occurs naturally during drawing and conferring times in the writing workshop schedule. During the conversation, Ms. Newman uses her words strategically to be inclusive via her pronoun and modal uses as well as her uses of such strategies as thinking aloud. The *Kid Writing* curriculum encourages the use of demonstrations to show children the actions of writers. Through demonstrations Ms. Newman is able to share information via the expert and novice model of learning. Ms. Newman improves the *Kid Writing* conference times by purposefully using language and discursive practices to enhance the dialogue. Her inclusive language is accented by her gestures of kneeling beside the student and her hand movements which complement her words.

Basically, the *Kid Writing* program enhances Ms. Newman’s sociocultural approach to writing workshop, but there is one aspect which can constrain relationship building as discussed in this chapter. That aspect is the concept of adult writing. There may be students, such as Eric, who are discouraged from writing because of adult writing. Eric did not want to have adult writing in his journal, so for that reason, he wrote only what he knew. This limited his journal entries. In this instance Ms. Newman might
consider another way to utilize the modeling of conventional writing so as to not inhibit certain writers.

Ms. Newman goes beyond conversing with students to include observing and listening to them so that she gains more information to better meet their needs as learners and writers. The Kid Writing program states that the teacher is to instruct to the needs of the individual students. In carrying out this goal, Ms. Newman found it necessary to observe and listen to students as well as converse to better build a positive relationship.

Both the Kid Writing curriculum and Ms. Newman’s practices are founded in sociocultural theory. It is through the social interaction that writing occurs. Building relationships within a community of writers aligns with a sociocultural perspective. Writing is grounded in the experiences of the student and is guided by the knowledge of the teacher. This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As was evident in Ms. Newman’s second-grade classroom, she used her expert discursive practices to help the students learn the language and skills necessary for school discourse (Gee, 1989). Together teacher and student co-constructed knowledge during writing instruction (Dyson, 1989, 2000; M. Haneda, 2004; Mari & Haneda & Wells, 2000).

It is the teacher’s responsibility to create an atmosphere that establishes relationships (Tobin, 1993) within a collaborative community so that knowledge can be co-constructed (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). The environment that Ms. Newman created emphasized the importance of social interaction during writing conferences. Ms.
Newman incorporated listening, conversation, and thinking out loud as necessary aspects of establishing a positive rapport with the students. Her role as co-constructor of knowledge with the student was defined by how she utilized her language and gestures to aid learning during writing instruction (Gee, 1989; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). She began by establishing the meaning of the text from the students and then utilized her discursive practices to share knowledge with the students so that everyone was actively engaged in the community of writers.

In conclusion, the teacher’s intent behind her interaction with students in this second-grade classroom during writing workshop was to construct knowledge together while focusing on editing the student’s text. This foundation was built on understanding the meaning of what the students had written. Through questioning and conversation techniques, Ms. Newman could understand the meaning of the student’s text. Through her linguistic and extralinguistic discursive practices she co-constructed knowledge. The next chapter will build on the supportive relationship that has been established within this collaborative community to analyze Ms. Newman’s language as she interacts with the students to pull them along as writers.
Building on the foundation of the previous chapter, I show how Ms. Newman pulls her students along the learning continuum to grow as writers. First, she focuses on each student to notice and name their actions and the content of their text. She instructs them by utilizing revealing or telling strategies. She personalizes each conference so that each student is productive as a writer: that is, learning and growing in the areas specific to their needs. Finally, I will connect Ms. Newman’s practices to a sociocultural perspective of writing workshop. The analyses in this chapter show the language themes that Ms. Newman uses to help her students grow as writers. The following is an example of how Ms. Newman pulls Bob along as a writer.

230. **Bob:** Do you know what my team is? The Lions yo. On the 28\(^{th}\) it was my brother’s birthday. It was fun!!! And we made hats, cool hats. Mine has lions, slugger. And it has a baseball on it!

231. **Ms. Newman:** Very nice, which brother? (looks at student smiling)

232. **Bob:** um Jack ((looks at teacher))

233. **Ms. Newman:** Oh, I bet he was excited? ((uses pencil to point to text while talking)) Okay, do you know what my team is? Good carat and I can tell you went back and you must have reread it? ((looks at student))

234. **Bob:** Yeah. ((nods yes))

235. **Ms. Newman:** ((student follows text as teacher talks)) And knew that you needed that [word my] there…On the 28\(^{th}\) it was my ((erasing)) brother’s birthday. Now we are going to squeeze - I see you ran out of room here - and we need to put e r apostrophe s. ((writes)) ((student looks at text)) Remember because that birthday belonged to your brother?

238. **Bob:** Yeah. ((looks at text))

239. **Ms. Newman:** …Now do you want to say that on the 28\(^{th}\) it was my brother’s birthday period? ((points to text)) Or do you want it to be a comma? ((points to text)) And then say it was fun? Cause I did hear your voice pause? Which one would you prefer? ((looks at student))

240. **Bob:** I would prefer a period. ((writes a period))
241. **Ms. Newman:** Okay, ((slight nod)) and then what happens to that I? ((student makes capital I)) Yes, sir, good job! It was fun. ((points to text)) Now, do we want to say, and we made hats? Or we made hats? You can do either? But which do you like best? ((looks at student))

242. **Bob:** And


After establishing a positive rapport with Bob (line 231-233), Ms. Newman scaffolds his learning through noticing, naming, and revealing strategies as together they edit Bob’s story. First she notices that Bob has inserted the missing word *my*. She names this editing strategy and gives Bob the credit for doing it (line 233) which he claims in Line 233. Throughout the conference she poses questions (line 241), gives Bob choices (lines 239, 241), and explains the editing process (line 235). Ms. Newman reveals the needed edits via questions and statements as she supports him in the editing process.

Ms. Newman states that

> [Conferencing] is very personalized depending on what their specific needs are. You know I might have done a grammar lesson, but I might be working with a child who is a very reluctant writer…So, I’m not going to keep revisiting the grammar lesson while I’m conferencing with them that particular day if I’m getting them to write just a little bit. Whereas, a child who is much more willing to write, we will talk about the grammar and how that reflects what we did in the minilesson. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, lines 66, 68)

In order to conduct a successful conference, Ms. Newman is concerned with the text that the student writes and with the student himself. Ms. Newman writes

> [I have] a clear understanding/picture of what [I] want the children to learn during the time they are in my class and… knowing each student's ability, awareness of writing, motivation, and most importantly where they are on the continuum so [I] can monitor their growth. (Ms. Newman, personal communication, June 12, 2007)

Using that knowledge, she builds a relationship (discussed in Chapter Five) in which she can instruct the student and move him along into school discourse within a sociocultural framework of writing workshop. She knows what she needs to teach and she uses her
expertise on the content and her insight about the students to direct her pedagogy. As the teacher confers with students during writing workshop, she uses her knowledge of content and of the individual. She also uses her knowledge of pedagogical practices that can provide a productive balance so that students can move into school discourse successfully.

For the purpose of analyzing the data, I have separated the themes which I discovered: building relationships and pulling the students along. In reality these language uses occurred simultaneously throughout the conferences. For this reason, there are overlaps with concepts and terms used so that you might notice a sense of familiarity as you read this chapter. Chapter Five emphasized the language uses for the building of relationships within the community of writers; whereas Chapter Six emphasizes the language uses for instructing the students as they grow in writing.

The previous chapter detailed the language and discursive practices that Ms. Newman utilized to build relationships within the writing community. Through observations, thinking out loud, and conversations she established positive rapport. Next, she established an understanding of the meaning of the student’s text before editing it with the student. Finally, she shared her knowledge and voice with the students as she conversed. This chapter builds on the relationship Ms. Newman established, so that she could then meet the individual needs of the students and pull them along as writers.

Ms. Newman’s goal for each student was for him to be a productive writer. “Productive is different for every child but in some way they are building their writing skills, no matter where they are” (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 84). What does Ms. Newman see in the student’s text to direct her as she helps each student to
become a productive writer? How does she use her language to instruct each student?

Although writing workshop relies on social interaction for meaning making, Ms. Newman teaches to each individual in her class.

School is a place to learn a new discourse to add to home discourses, a place to enter new worlds and refigure boundaries (Gee, 2000; Giroux, 2001). One of the teacher’s responsibilities is building and bridging discourses through social practices so that students view themselves as successfully literate (Gee, 2001b). Writing is one way in which a teacher can help students learn school discourse.

Learning during writing workshop involves taking spontaneous everyday experiences which are the content of the students’ journal entries and teaching scientific concepts to provide the school discourse knowledge and labels for the writing exercises (Vygotsky, 1986). This learning is accomplished in the social context of writing workshop but under the expert guidance of the teacher. This chapter explains the language and strategies that Ms. Newman utilized to accomplish scientific learning.

One use of language, as Johnston (2004) states, noticing and naming go beyond the mechanics of writing, such as spelling and punctuation, and includes the attitude and behaviors of writers. The ultimate goal in noticing and naming is to provide space for students to claim identities so that they become self-sufficient writers. If children can act strategically, they can accomplish their goals and in this way they have a sense of agency. As Johnston (2004) states, “Teachers’ conversations with children help the children build bridges between action and consequences that develop their sense of agency” (p. 30). Ms Newman accomplished this goal for her students in various ways. She noticed and named
students’ actions and writing styles; and provided metalanguage for what they were accomplishing during writing workshop.

As she talked with the students about their writing, she noticed and named their writing actions providing metalanguage for the students to understand their own actions. Second, by utilizing revealing and telling strategies (Cazden, 1992) she guided the students in learning specific concepts. Also, when needed, she utilized other strategies like the word wall, graphic organizers, and literature. While conversing with each student, Ms. Newman met their individual needs while using language purposefully and strategically.

The Language of Noticing and Naming

The ultimate goal in noticing and naming is to provide space for students to claim identities so that they become self-sufficient writers. In Chapter Five I analyzed Carmen’s conference in light of the pronoun use. In this section I analyze sections of the same conference but with an emphasis on becoming a self-sufficient writer. When conferring with Carmen, Ms. Newman notices her use of editing skills. Naming this action gives Carmen an identity with which to claim: an identity of acting like a writer.

297. Ms. Newman: Okay, you know what I like? I can tell when I look at this story that you already went back through ((hand motions)) and did some self-editing, didn’t you? ((looks at student)) You have a carat [notation for adding words], you have a couple of words that you’ve crossed off because you didn’t feel like they needed to be there.

298. Carmen: I put lines like this so ((uses pencil to erase and fix something)) I knew like when what sentences started and ended. ((looks at teacher))

299. Ms. Newman: Very good! ((hand motions)) You are really thinking like a writer, and you know what? That’s what is really important right now. ((Carmen looks at teacher)) When you say I still don’t know what to write about, that’s okay. You weren’t sure what to write, but ((looking at student))
Ms. Newman notices and names the self-editing strategies that Carmen utilizes such as using a carat to add words and crossing off unwanted words (line 297). Ms Newman labels Carmen a writer because she is thinking like a writer (line 299) and states that action is what is important during writing workshop. Carmen claims the identity of a writer by stating that she did these writing behaviors on three pages (line 302) and by the words of her text (line 305). When Ms. Newman confers with Carmen, she often states that she displays the actions and attitude of a writer. She explicitly states this reality and Carmen claims the identity of a writer with her words and actions.

Ms. Newman presented the idea that writers self-edit and Carmen excitedly claims that she likes to do those kinds of marks like carats (line 167). The teacher states that when a student uses editing marks, it shows that she knows “how to fix stuff” like writers do (line 170).

In the context of school discourse using editing marks and composing during writing workshop are important behaviors to utilize. Carmen knows what is expected of
her during this literacy event. Although she is unable to think of anything specific about which to write, she still engages in the process of writing: the correct cultural model for this context. When the teacher praises her for proper use of her time and strategies, she is building Carmen’s self-image as a writer.

Carmen views herself as an author because she knows how to use writer’s strategies and work like a writer. She feels like an author because Ms. Newman has labeled her actions as author-like. Early in the year Carmen was reluctant to risk writing so when she did write, Ms. Newman praised her for those sentences although they were not deep with meaning. Concerning students like this, Ms. Newman felt that “at least for them to get something down is a sense of growth and accomplishment and I can build on that after they get a little bit more confidence” (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 26).

Ms. Newman realized that Carmen needed to write before she could learn the grammar of writing. In this way, the teacher prioritized the needs of the student over teaching the content of the curriculum. As she said,

I get them to feel comfortable putting those anything kind of stories you know meaningless or ones without too much depth down. Then I can up the ante a little bit later and I can say well, let’s talk about beginning, middle and an end, and let’s talk about a character and forming a character and those kinds of things. (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 24)

It is important to start where the student is academically and build on that foundation as Ms. Newman modeled while conferring with Carmen. As Lassonde (2006) states, how the teacher or peers view the student impacts the student’s view of himself. In the next excerpt it is evident that both the opinions of the teacher and a student impacted the way that Albert felt about his writings.
Albert enjoys writing directions for connecting computer game cubes to the television. His detailed directions are well written and Ms. Newman comments on that by declaring that Albert could be the person who writes the directions.

106. **Ms. Newman**: Okay. ((nodding and pointing)) This is almost like a set of directions. ((student looking at text)) You could be the guy that writes the directions in all the game cubes? How about it? ((student looks at teacher))

109. **Albert**: Yeah, it’s gonna to take a long time. ((looking at teacher))

110. **Ms. Newman**: It does, now but it’s step by step I could take this. ((lifts journal)) I don’t know anything about game cubes and things like that, but I could probably take this and hook it up because you gave such clear directions. So I think your step-by-step directions are good.

111. **Bob**: I’ve been listening. It’s pretty good.

112. **Ms. Newman**: Is it pretty good? Is that kind of how you do it also? ((looking at Bob))

113. **Bob**: A lot of detail.

114. **Ms. Newman**: It is a lot of detail. I love detail in writing.

115. **Albert**: I mean it’s better than the booklet. It says put a wire into the game cube.

116. **Ms. Newman**: um hum

117. **Albert**: ((looking at teacher)) And then you have to get the game and put the game into the game cube. I mean I told how to like shut it and open it and all that. ((teacher nodding head yes)) (Albert, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 106-117)

Because the directions are so well written, Ms. Newman, who knows nothing about this process, feels that she could successfully complete the operation (line 110). Even Albert’s peer, Bob, makes a positive comment about the great detail in the directions (lines 111, 113). Albert concludes this dialogue by stating that his directions are better than the booklet because he gives more details (lines 115-116). Ms. Newman notices the genre that Albert is writing and then creates space in the community for him to claim during this conference. Later when I interviewed him, he said, “When I go over to it and read it, I’ll be like wow! I did this good work. And it makes it me feel good about how good I wrote” (Albert, interview, June 1, 2006, line 44).
When Ms. Newman utilizes the noticing and naming strategy, she looks at the text to guide her discussion. In Carmen’s text she noticed editing strategies used correctly and therefore named Carmen a writer because she worked like a writer. In Albert’s text she noticed details of the “how-to” writing genre, so she named Albert a writer because he wrote like a writer. Her goal in utilizing this strategy is to help these students become self-sufficient writers who believed in their own abilities as writers.

**The Language of Revealing**

Questions and conditional sentences can be used to assess the students’ knowledge, to gain information from them, to lead them into a better understanding of their actions, and to reveal lessons to be learned (Eodice, 1998; Haneda & Wells, 2000). Ms. Newman uses questions and comments to guide her instruction by revealing or telling (Cazden, 1992) to best meet the needs of the students.

**Using Questions**

Ms. Newman used a questioning strategy to assess Tailyn’s knowledge about punctuation and capitalization rules. During this conference she often said, “What do we need to do now?” The following excerpt is an example of using questions to assess and gain information.

105. **Ms. Newman**: Okay, where do you think would be a good spot to end that first sentence?
106. **Tailyn**: There. ((points with her pencil, then writes a period))
107. **Ms. Newman**: I agree. ((nods head)) I think that’s a great spot because you know what else, not only can we put a period there. ((points)) We can remove one of the words there that’s kind of repeated a lot. ((Tailyn crosses out the word and while teacher nods yes)) Good job! ((nods head)) Now what happens to the word it?
108. **Tailyn**: Capital I, aahh ((picking up pencil (it drops onto her lap) and erases and, then writes capital letter for It)) (Conference, Tailyn, April 25, 2006, lines 105-108)

The information that Ms. Newman is seeking -- punctuation, word deletion, and capitalization -- is knowledge that Ms. Newman already possesses. Since she desires to know what Tailyn understands; she poses questions which elicit this knowledge. First, she asks the student about punctuation (line 105). Tailyn decides and then places a period where she thought it should go (line 106). Ms. Newman confirms this action by nodding her head and pointing to the place in the text. Ms. Newman then comments about an overly used word which Tailyn deletes (line 107). Again the teacher nods her assent along with the positive words, “good job.” Ms. Newman then asks about what should happen to the next word which now begins a sentence. Tailyn adds a capital letter (line 108). Tailyn makes these necessary edits under the guidance of Ms. Newman as she poses assessment questions to direct Tailyn to the correct answers. As the expert, she guides Tailyn to discover the correct writing conventions as they edit together (Applebee, 1986).

When Ms. Newman saw Tailyn’s text, she noticed writing convention errors. Through a series of questions, she led Tailyn to determine the necessary edits. In this guided discovery manner Tailyn practiced the skill of self-editing.

In another use of questions, Ms. Newman helps students to understand why they performed a certain action. She names what the action is and helps the student understand why the action was performed. In this way the student gains metalanguage to understand the process behind the action. This pedagogical approach combines both of Cazden’s (1992) instructional strategies of revealing and telling.
Tailyn: Last night all the crazy, fat, silly, funny, stupid people were there. Even the television was a robot slash person. A person had a party in his hat. He and he had braces too. There was Me. Was. Wait. There was Me. Aach!

Ms. Newman: Okay, what do you think you might do, since you stopped there? Why did you stop there?

Tailyn: Because it doesn’t make sense.

Ms. Newman: Okay, that’s what self-editing is all about. (Tailyn, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 334-337)

In line 335 Ms. Newman led Tailyn to discover why she was stopping in the middle of her story by asking a question (Figure 2). From Tailyn’s answer she was able to discern the student’s thinking and thus name this strategy self-editing in Line 337. Through questioning, Ms. Newman led Tailyn to better understand her own actions and to give her the metalanguage to label it: when something does not make sense, it is time to self-edit.

Using Conditional Sentences

Another language structure which Ms. Newman utilized to help her students while conferring during writing instruction was the conditional sentence. In order to help students determine which corrections to make, Ms. Newman would use conditional sentences that would lead the students to discover the proper word usage. During Carmen’s conference, she had written “Tabitha and me.” The following dialogue shows how Ms. Newman led her to think through finding the right pronoun to use without just telling her.

Ms. Newman: …instead of saying here Tabitha and me. What do you refer to yourself as? Instead of me what would you say? Here Tabitha and (leans in toward student)

Carmen: My name? (begins to write, looks up to the teacher, then erases)

Ms. Newman: mmm, What if you wanted to not use your name? (points to text) You want to talk about yourself (looks at student) but instead of me you might use
In this conference interchange, Ms. Newman provides four different conditional sentences (lines 163, 165, 167) along with questions (line 161) trying to lead Carmen to discover the correct pronoun to use in her sentence (line 168). Building on what Ms. Newman knows that Carmen understands -- the correct use of the first person subject pronoun -- she continues to present different scenarios until Carmen discerns the correct answer. The teacher looks at Carmen and also uses hand motions to complement the situations that she is explaining. Although Carmen needed to make this correction, the teacher did not simply tell her the answer. She used conversation as a relearning time for Carmen as she guided her to the answer through sentences that revealed more and more information to help her make the edit in the sentence.

In summary, Ms. Newman chooses to use questions and conditional sentences in order to meet the learning needs of her students. She uses questions not only to assess the students’ knowledge but also to explain to the students about their actions so that she can teach metalanguage. Ms. Newman uses conditional sentences to teach the students by leading them to discover the information that is needed in the passage being edited.
Choosing specific sentence structures during writing conference times is one way the teacher can scaffold learning to write.

**The Language of Telling**

Besides revealing information to students, Ms. Newman also tells the students information to help them in their writing process. During conference time there are many strategies available to assist students. Helping students to utilize spelling strategies, the word wall, graphic organizers, and literature are just a few of the telling strategies that Ms. Newman used during writing workshop.

**Using Spelling Strategies and the Word Wall**

Although Sharon usually does not have trouble deciding what to write during workshop time, she has difficulty spelling the words she wants to use. Sharon’s letter and sound understanding is not as developed as her peers. Ms. Newman presents a strategy that can help her with spelling.

227. **Ms. Newman**: Skating is a pretty big word. (writes skating) What do you hear at the end of skating?
228. **Sharon**: ing (looking at text)
229. **Ms. Newman**: Right!
230. **Sharon**: I forget that. (lays head on table)
231. **Ms. Newman**: Definitely need that.
232. **Sharon**: I forgot that ing.
233. **Ms. Newman**: mmm, Sometimes it’s just stopping and listening to the word. (Sharon, conference, April 25, 2006, lines 227-233)

23. **Ms. Newman**: A tree house snapped (writes) him up. Sometimes it’s just a matter of sounding that word out, stretching that word, trying to get all those sounds that are easy to miss. And a tree snapped him, (writes) him is a word wall word.
24. **Sharon**: Oh yeah? (Sharon, conference, May 2, 2006, lines 23-24)
Ms. Newman reminds Sharon to slowly stretch out the word and listen to the sounds that she hears so that she can spell it more conventionally (lines 233, 23). Also in Line 23 she reminds Sharon to use the word wall for those high frequency words. The word wall is a bulletin board in the classroom that is filled with the most used words which students might need to know how to spell (Figure 4). The goal is to encourage students to refer to the word wall and spell the words correctly which should eventually help them in learning the word (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 32).

**Using a Graphic Organizer**

Another strategy which Ms. Newman shared with Sharon was a web graphic organizer. Before Sharon would begin writing, the teacher would write down important words which matched the topic of Sharon’s story. Then while she was composing, she could refer to the web. The other words could be found on the word wall, or she could use her kid writing skills. While this aid was helpful, “we didn’t do that all the time by any means but once in awhile just to support” her (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 94).

Throughout the conferencing times Ms. Newman presented strategies for spelling which were school writing habits to be developed. Sharon did not seem to claim these strategies because she often said, “I forgot” or “[I] didn’t know that” (Sharon, conference, April 25, 2006, line 232, 265). Sharon viewed herself as a writer because she usually had text written when it was time for a conference. She was not stuck deciding what to write. Sharon said to me in her interview, “I just like to do it [writing], and it is fun” (Sharon, interview, June 1, 2006, line 4).
Using Literature

Ms. Newman builds on Tailyn’s creative imaginative writing to instruct her on school discourse. In the beginning of the year Tailyn’s stories were very simple such as “I have a cat and his name is...So for her to build on the story, we had to talk about details and beginnings, middles, and endings, so that she had a better concept” of how to add to her basic stories. One strategy was reading from picture books to show Tailyn how other authors began or ended their stories (Ms. Newman, interview, April 18, 2007, line 112). Through reading literature and conversation, Ms. Newman encouraged Tailyn to use story structure with more descriptive language.

Ms. Newman used strategies to provide hands-on support for students in their writing. While conferring, the teacher modeled the use of spelling strategies such as the word wall so that students like Sharon would be able to write more independently. While conferring, the teacher utilized literature as models of story structure, so that students like Tailyn could refer to that resource when needed.

A Sociocultural Kid Writing Workshop in Ms. Newman’s Classroom

The Kid Writing program itself values the culture of the students which is evident in the use and acceptance of kid writing and the stories based on their experiences. The Kid Writing program enables Ms. Newman to build on the culture and knowledge that the students bring to school. Therefore she begins instruction with the stories that they tell and then bridges to school discourse.

A sociocultural perspective relies on expert and novice individuals working together in a learning situation. When the teacher as the expert builds on spontaneous
learning to instruct scientific concepts, she enhances the learning of the student. This Vygotskian principle is evident in Ms. Newman’s conferring practices and is enabled through the *Kid Writing* program.

Building on her knowledge of the individual learner and on her own content knowledge, Ms. Newman conducts personalized conferences with her students. Because she knows where they are on the continuum of learning to write, she is able to personalize their learning. In this way, Carmen felt like a writer. This encouraged her to continue to write like a writer. Ms. Newman noticed Carmen’s actions and by having them labeled, Carmen was able to claim them and call herself a writer. In the case of Albert, Ms. Newman built on his own recognition of being an author and noticed and named the genre in which he was writing. Because learning is contextual, Ms. Newman is able to personalize her instruction and pull each student along the continuum of growing as a writer.

The *Kid Writing* program states that the teacher is to instruct the students in phonics and writing skills as needed by the individual, stressing that it is the process of interaction where learning occurs rather than in using specific teaching materials. The curriculum allows great flexibility on the teacher’s part to interpret how she will deliver the writing instruction.

In this chapter I analyzed the language themes that Ms. Newman utilized to deliver writing instruction to her students. She used sociocultural-based teaching strategies such as revealing and telling. These strategies rely on contextual use so that Ms. Newman is able to decide based on the student’s needs whether to reveal or tell the
information. These strategies also utilize the conference format which involves a
conversational social interaction.

Through questions and conditional sentences, Ms. Newman revealed writing
knowledge to her students. In this way, they were able to co-construct knowledge as well
as build on the spontaneous everyday stories that the students wrote. For example, Ms.
Newman guided Tailyn into making various editing corrections via a series of questions.
In this way Tailyn participated in the activity of editing and thus was more engaged.

By utilizing telling strategies, Ms. Newman shared skills with the students which
could be claimed for them to use in the future. In the context of specific student writing,
she scaffolded their instruction with knowledge of strategy uses that could support them
independently. For example, Sharon was supported in her spelling by learning to listen to
words as she said them, by using the word wall as a resource, and by relying on graphic
organizers when possible. Ms. Newman pulled her students along as writers by revealing
and telling them knowledge and strategies about writing.

Ms. Newman utilized a sociocultural approach to writing instruction while using
the Kid Writing program. She valued learning as a social-interactive process. She based
instruction contextually for each student. Ms. Newman used her language to help her
students be productive writers.

**Conclusion**

I would like to return to the questions that I posed at the beginning of this chapter.
First, “What does Ms. Newman see in the student’s text to direct her as she helps each
student to become a productive writer?” In Carmen’s text she saw editing skills being
utilized which revealed the actions of a writer. In Albert’s text she saw the detailed writings of a specific genre which labeled him a writer. In Tailyn’s text she saw the beginnings of a story which only needed the reading of a picture book to provide the support for the story to unfold. In Sharon’s text she saw an interesting story with spelling errors so she supported her with spelling strategies. Ms. Newman saw each student’s strength first and then the area of need that she supported so that each student could become a productive writer.

Ms. Newman provided positive support to meet the needs of each student which leads us to the second question: “How does she use her language to instruct each student?” First, she noticed the positive aspects of their texts and named those associated actions so that she could present an identity for them to claim. Second, she supported them in the learning process by guiding them to understanding the writing concepts or metalanguage. She used questions, conditional sentences, and multiple strategies to move the students to becoming self-sufficient writers.

Ms. Newman is a student-centered teacher who follows the interests of the individual and seeks to find what motivates each student (Ms. Newman, interview, February 23, 2006, line 62). She teaches to the specific needs of the students. It is not simply the language that Ms. Newman uses; but it is the interaction when the language is spoken that becomes the important context for learning. In accomplishing her goal, Ms. Newman builds a relationship with each of the students as she confers with them during writing workshop. She labels their actions as those of a writer as she did with Carmen and Albert. She builds on the skills that the students possess and moves them along into school discourse as she did with Sharon and Tailyn. Using her
knowledge of the students, she interacts with them providing supportive activities to scaffold them so that they can become successful writers. Although my examples are just isolated snapshots of the students, Ms. Newman interacted in multiple ways with all the students in her class.
Chapter 7

An Analysis of the Kid Writing Curriculum

In this research study I observed Ms. Newman utilizing the Kid Writing curriculum to conduct writing workshop in order to instruct her second graders. My purpose in conducting this study was not to evaluate Kid Writing. The Kid Writing curriculum was the outline from which the teacher instructed. For that reason, it is important to analyze the curriculum according to the way it was used by Ms. Newman and in light of the sociocultural theoretical framework of this study. I make use of the Kid Writing curriculum in a similar fashion to Ms. Newman: merely as a starting point. In my case, I will use Kid Writing to discuss writing workshop as it is affected by sociocultural theory.

In this chapter I review the tenets of the Kid Writing curriculum and compare them to a sociocultural theoretical perspective. Second, I align Kid Writing to the models of writing workshop discussed in Chapter Two. Next, I show how Ms. Newman utilized Kid Writing in her second-grade classroom as described in Chapters Five and Six. I discuss the limitations and possibilities of Kid Writing in light of a sociocultural ideal. Then I move to an emphasis on this study discussing the implications, limitations, and further study suggestions. I conclude with a short reflective piece on my learning as a researcher and educator.

Kid Writing: A Curriculum

The Kid Writing curriculum represents a systematic approach to teaching phonics and writing skills within a writing workshop format. However the stated teaching
emphasis is on the social interactions of the learners and not on utilizing specific materials. *Kid Writing* workshop relies on a supportive environment where students are encouraged to dialogue with their peers, as well as adults, during the writing process. The teacher’s role is to model writing and scaffold learning by teaching to each student’s specific needs as a writer. In this way, meaning is constructed in the social interactions of talking and writing within a community of writers.

There is a recommended format for conducting *Kid Writing* workshop. Students begin first by drawing and talking about their experiences from home or school in order to brainstorm writing topics. During the writing process the students are encouraged to use “kid writing” which is invented spelling based on their knowledge of letter and sound combinations as well as their personally developed sight word vocabulary. The students are encouraged to use the resources around the room -- the environment and the people -- while composing their text, while waiting for time to conference with the teacher or another adult.

Conference time provides the teacher with the opportunity to individualize instruction. The conference begins with the student reading his journal to the teacher. Writing and phonics instruction during the individual conference is based on the story the student has written or drawn in the journal. At this point, the teacher praises the child for certain actions and then decides what spelling or writing skill to discuss. A trademark of the *Kid Writing* curriculum is the “adult writing” that the teacher does on the student’s journal. While discussing the positive aspects of the text and praising the child’s approximations, the teacher explains the conventional ways of spelling words. After
conferring with the teacher, the student rereads the text while looking at the conventional spelling.

At the end of writing workshop, selected students share their stories with the whole class. The teacher chooses minilessons from these journal entries to teach to the class. In this way students not only receive individual help during conference times but also they are instructed on phonics and writing skills which the teacher decides are applicable to the whole class. Both conference time and sharing time are built around the students’ texts and the learning is accomplished through social dialogue.

*Kid Writing: A Sociocultural Perspective*

Learning is social, uses language to construct meaning, and is contextual within a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural learning occurs in a cultural context and within social interaction where meaning is constructed inside the situation. Learning involves utilizing practices, language, and culture in a specific situation. In other words, learning is a social activity that is situated within a specific culture. The *Kid Writing* curriculum states that learning to write is a social activity with peers and the teacher that occurs in the culture of the classroom. During *Kid Writing* students learn the practices and language of school discourse through the process of writing in writing workshop. It is through the community of learners that the students grow as writers: listening to and talking with others in the classroom. Therefore *Kid Writing* represents a sociocultural learning activity.

Language, as viewed through a sociocultural lens, is a vehicle for constructing meaning within a social activity. Through language people share their experiences,
understand other people’s perspectives, and construct new knowledge. Language is more than a means to communicate within a social activity. In Kid Writing language is used to construct stories for writing, to explain meaning while discussing the text, and to construct knowledge while conferring about the text. In Kid Writing the students use their spontaneous experiences to compose texts and the teacher utilizes scientific learning to instruct writing concepts. Language in Kid Writing is used in a sociocultural way to construct meaning within a social activity.

Learning is social. Learning involves being immersed within a cultural activity so that through participation learning occurs. Kid Writing is a writing workshop approach to learning to write. Through Kid Writing the students are immersed in the process of writing in the classroom where the teacher can bridge from their lived experience stories to school discourse writing. Kid Writing is a sociocultural contextual learning experience for learning to write.

Learning is contextual. Kid Writing aligns with a sociocultural perspective of learning. Learning to write in Kid Writing is a social activity involving interactions with peers and the teacher. Learning to write in Kid Writing involves using both written and oral language as a means to construct knowledge and share ideas. Learning to write in Kid Writing is a contextual experience that builds on the personal stories of the students to bridge to the school discourse of writing. The Kid Writing program provides a sociocultural experience for its users.

As teachers ponder how to help students to be productive, this sociocultural framework can provide a lens from which to view a solution. Writing, via Kid Writing, can be taught within the cultural process of making meaning during social interactions.
Knowledge gained from studying the language use within the *Kid Writing* interactions during conference time is important as these interactions comprise the vehicle for learning. Since the expert person in this interaction directs the learning into higher mental levels, observing the teacher during *Kid Writing* is vital to understand the process. It is through a sociocultural lens that I answered my research questions. (1) How does Ms. Newman use language to build relationships within the community of writing workshop? (2) How does Ms. Newman use language to provide social assistance during writing conferences?

**Kid Writing: A Psycho-linguistic Model of Writing Workshop**

Although *Kid Writing* contains aspects of three of the models discussed in Chapter Two, it is best labeled a psycho-linguistic approach to writing workshop. The psycho-linguistic model is primarily characterized by purposeful teacher language to directly instruct specific phonics and writing skills, but it also includes a major component of both the expressionist and the socio-linguistic models of writing workshop. The expressionist model emphasizes that students should freely writing about their personal experiences. In the socio-linguistic model the role that the community plays while writing is important. The psycho-linguistic model of writing workshop, then, is characterized by students writing about their personal experiences, by the interactions of peers and the teacher during instruction, and finally by the strong role that the teacher plays in providing direct instruction during individual conferencing.

Although the role of the teacher in each of these models is different, the teacher’s role in the psycho-linguistic model encompasses the first two. In the expressionist model
the major role of the teacher is to be a listener. In the socio-linguistic model the major role of the teacher is to be a facilitator. In the psycho-linguistic model the teacher is not only a listener and a facilitator but also an instructor of specific content concerning writing.

As Kid Writing is a psycho-linguistic model of writing workshop, both students and teacher have designated roles. First, Kid Writing students are encouraged to write stories from their personal experiences, and they have free choice of writing topics. Next, Kid Writing students rely on the community of learners to compose text and make meaning of the writing process. Third, the Kid Writing teacher is a listener, a facilitator, and an instructor of specific content whose job is to teach strategically and purposefully. The goal of Kid Writing is to teach phonics and writing skills which the teacher accomplishes while conferring with students. Through adult writing, the teacher models conventional and correct spelling. Kid Writing utilizes the teacher as one who scaffolds learning through social interaction with the students.

Finally, the instructional design of the Kid Writing curriculum best aligns with the psycho-linguistic model of writing workshop. The title of the curriculum reflects a psycho-linguistic approach -- Kid Writing: A systematic approach to phonics, journals, and writing workshop. According to the title Kid Writing is a cognitive approach to learning phonics and writing. According to the introduction in the curriculum text, Kid Writing is a sociocultural way of learning phonics and writing. In other words, through the social interactions of the students and the teacher, students learn the cognitive concepts of phonics and writing. Kid Writing is a psycho-linguistic model of writing workshop grounded in a sociocultural foundation.
Kid Writing: Ms. Newman’s Implementation

Whenever Ms. Newman talked with me, she always started with the same theme: the students. She had a student-centered philosophy and a student-driven pedagogy. Ms. Newman believed that the classroom belonged to the students and their interests guided her instruction. The students were also the center of her implementation of Kid Writing.

Building Relationships

Building relationships with the students was the starting point of her academic teaching. Her pedagogy was based on knowledge of the content and knowledge of her students. Ms. Newman took an avid interest in her students and used that knowledge to guide her teaching. In the case of Eric, she became a watcher and a listener so that she could better guide him in the process of writing, which was a difficult endeavor for him. Ms. Newman used conversations with students to enlarge their writing expertise. In the case of Bob, she talked to him about subjects in which he was interested so that he could better grasp the multitude of topics about which he could write. Although knowing her students was important, how she used language to converse was also vital to utilizing Kid Writing optimally.

While conferring with students, Ms. Newman used her language to conduct learning in a constructive manner. In this way, she wanted the students to feel comfortable talking with her, and she wanted to construct knowledge with them so that they were participating in the conference. For example, by using inclusive pronouns and modals of possibility, she made editing a job of co-constructing possible choices. In the case of Albert, together he and Ms. Newman decided the most appropriate places for
punctuation based on his pauses while reading, that is, his interpretation of the text.

During *Kid Writing* conferencing, along with her language use, Ms. Newman also used her discursive practices to support students in a positive manner.

Ms. Newman established positive rapport with her students by showing interest in them, using inclusive language, and by using body language positively. Ms. Newman always sat or knelt beside the student. She used hand motions to explain or complement her dialogue about the text. For example, when she put her arm on Albert’s chair, it was as though she were making a space for just the two of them to converse about his text. Pointing to particular parts of the text also focused Albert on the section that they were discussing. When gestures complement dialogue, they can add to better understanding of the text. Ms. Newman built relationships during *Kid Writing* conferences through her language use and discursive practices.

The *Kid Writing* curriculum states that the teacher needs to meet the needs of the individual student, but it does not tell the teacher how to do that. Ms. Newman chose to learn about her students and build a positive rapport through her language and gestures during *Kid Writing* conferences.

**Pulling Students Along**

The *Kid Writing* curriculum states that teachers are to support the student and explicitly teach to his needs both in phonics and in writing, but it does not tell the teacher how to accomplish this feat. Ms. Newman believes that each student will move along the writing continuum at his own pace. She has termed this notion as productivity. Her goal is to help each student to become a productive writer. That is, one who grows in his
ability to write. I have labeled what Ms. Newman does as pulling the student along on the road of writing.

During *Kid Writing* conference times, Ms. Newman noticed and named their actions and textual content so that the students could gain metalanguage and could create an identity as a writer. For example, when she noticed that Carmen was using editing strategies just like a writer, she named Carmen a writer which empowered her to continue writing and to be proud of the editing skills she had utilized. At another time, Ms. Newman noticed Tailyn rereading a text and she labeled that action as an editing strategy. So that the next time Tailyn’s text did not make sense, she knew that rereading was a good strategy to use. Tailyn now had the metalanguage to label her own actions. When Ms. Newman used noticing and naming techniques while conferring, she was increasing the productivity of her students by giving them an identity to claim and the metalanguage to better understand their writing actions.

*Kid Writing* conference time was also a time to explicitly instruct in phonics and writing skills. Ms. Newman accomplished this by utilizing two strategies: revealing and telling. Through the use of questions and conditional sentences, she led the students to discover the needed edits in their text. For example, through the use of conditional sentences, Ms. Newman revealed to Carmen the proper pronoun to use in her text. Since Ms. Newman knew that Carmen possessed the knowledge necessary to make the correction, she scaffolded her discovery of that knowledge. Another strategy that Ms. Newman used was telling the students what they needed to know. In this way, they were provided with the knowledge for future use. In the case of Sharon, Ms. Newman shared with her various strategies, such as listening carefully to the word, using the word wall,
and completing a graphic organizer to assist her with spelling while writing in her journal. These were strategies that Sharon could choose to use in the future so that she was a more self-sufficient writer.

Ms. Newman used *Kid Writing* conference time to pull students along so that they grew as writers. She based her instruction on the personal stories that they wrote. She taught the students the skills they needed by guiding them to the answers or by explicitly telling them. The *Kid Writing* curriculum provided a format for Ms. Newman to conduct writing workshop, but she relied on her content knowledge and her knowledge of her students to specifically teach them so that they could be productive writers.

*Kid Writing: Limitations and Possibilities*

This study revealed how one teacher implemented the *Kid Writing* curriculum in her second-grade classroom. The results cannot be generalized, but there are valuable lessons to be learned.

The *Kid Writing* curriculum is built on a sociocultural underpinning. Because of its strong foundation on learning as a social and contextual event, students are active participants making meaning while interacting during writing workshop. Also, because students are writing from their personal experiences, this knowledge becomes the bridge from which teachers can begin instructing school discourse. *Kid Writing* can be a very student-centered curriculum if the teacher views the student as important as did Ms. Newman. Student-centeredness can be a strength of *Kid Writing*.

The *Kid Writing* curriculum is a guide for teaching phonics and writing skills in a writing workshop format through the social interactions between students and teacher.
The *Kid Writing* curriculum provides the philosophical foundations for the program and a pedagogical guide. For experienced teachers, this curriculum offers flexibility and choices while implementing writing workshop. For new teachers this program might not provide enough specific details regarding how to implement the *Kid Writing* format, especially conducting conferences. For that reason, this study shows the language used by a master teacher while conferring with her students. The findings from this study can provide language models for teachers to follow as they begin to use *Kid Writing*. The teacher’s language use can be a strength or a limitation of implementing the *Kid Writing* curriculum.

Although writing instruction in *Kid Writing* begins with the stories the students write from their experiences, it is up to the teacher to value and use these texts as a platform to learn school discourse. The *Kid Writing* curriculum empowers the teacher. It would be very easy for an uninformed teacher to misuse this curriculum. A teacher could over-emphasize explicit instruction and teach outside of the framework of the student’s text which would invalidate the social construction of knowledge in a contextual activity. In that case, the teacher could be a limitation of the *Kid Writing* curriculum.

Characteristics of school writing are well supported by *Kid Writing*; however writing has multiple purposes and audiences. As such, *Kid Writing* is limiting because it mainly addresses school discourse through journaling for teacher conferencing. Ms. Newman realized that writing involved more than journaling. During the school day Ms. Newman often engaged students in other types of writing, such as asking a student to writer her a reminder note and requiring her students to do research writing.
In essence, it is the teacher who is the power behind successfully implementing *Kid Writing*. The teacher’s philosophical beliefs which guide her pedagogical practices would influence her implementation of the *Kid Writing* curriculum. *Kid Writing* is a totally flexible sociocultural curriculum. Experienced teachers grounded philosophically and pedagogically in sociocultural theory would effectively meet the students’ needs. But an inexperienced teacher might overly emphasize the skills aspects thus losing the sociocultural strengths of the program.

Although this study is unique, it does reveal how one teacher uses her language to positively influence the writing growth of her students. The *Kid Writing* curriculum hinges on the teacher: how she talks through conferences. So this study suggests possible language uses and themes to help the new teacher in a more powerful way to pull students along into writing during a psycho-linguistic writing conference.

**Limitations and Further Study**

A microethnography is not meant to be universally applicable. I have presented enough data to allow teachers in a similar situation to learn from this research. As is true of most microethnographies, this study focuses on a very small segment of the school discourse of Ms. Newman and her second-grade class. The social interactions which occur daily are amazingly complex. I chose to focus on her language as Ms. Newman supported and challenged her students during writing conferences.

The other data which I have collected -- the students’ writing journals, video-recordings of the students dialoguing while they were in first grade, etc. -- will need to
await later analysis. These other data could eventually help to further reveal the complex story of this group of students.

There are also many types of data, which in hindsight, I wish I had collected. For example, I could have videotaped more of the students’ dialogue during writing instruction in second grade. This interaction could have shed light on the novice-expert relationship as it applies to students. In fact, upon occasion, Ms. Newman pulled other “expert” students into the dialogue at conference time. Also, I wish I had collected student interview data of a reflective and descriptive nature concerning their own writing and interactions with others and the teacher. These data could have shed light on the thinking behind the writing and how the social interaction affected their writing.

What Did I Learn?

Implementing a research study was an invaluable learning experience in and of itself, but the result of this study was particularly profitable to me personally. First, the tremendous complexity of the learning interaction and the school environment can’t be assessed in a simple fashion. Today’s school culture is very content-driven with high-stakes testing playing a very dominant role. There is a demand for “highly qualified” teachers to know their content so as to teach to the yearly test. Learning is actually a complex process and teachers need to know both their content and their students so as to provide the best learning environment. For example, when students display their writing knowledge in multiple situations throughout the school day, the teacher is able to support that spontaneous learning and provide scientific instruction to move the students along
the continuum of learning. One high-stakes test cannot adequately gauge a student’s progress.

Second, content and context are not equally important at all times, rather the master teacher knows the student, the content, and how to blend both into an effective learning situation. For example, Ms. Newman wove the content of writing instruction into the everyday stories that the students wrote. She used her knowledge of grammar and story structure to teach each student the necessary skills. Within the context of the classroom the process of writing is woven with the content of writing. This study emphasized again to me the importance of my sociocultural stance: learning is social, contextual, and uses language to construct meaning. Expert teachers interweave content and context.

This study has a particular relevance to me as I move from the practice of teaching in the public school to the role of instructing preservice teachers at the university level. I need to continuously stress with my college students that they need to think about the social aspects of learning as much as they do about the content. Not much time in the education curriculum is spent teaching preservice teachers how to build rapport with children. As I teach preservice teachers the content of literacy instruction, I need to constantly keep Ms. Newman’s words in mind.

[W]riters have to be supported and encouraged. (Ms. Newman, personal communication, July 31, 2007)
References


research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry (pp. 127-149). Cambridge, UK: University Press.


Appendix A

Timeline for Research Study and Data Collection

1. Fall 2003   Took *Kid Writing* training
2. Spring 2004 Taught *Kid Writing* in kindergarten
3. Spring 2005 Videotaped first-grade *Kid Writing*
4. February 2006 Interviewed second-grade teacher
5. February-March 2006 Took field notes in second grade
6. April-May 2006 Videotaped second-grade writing conferences
7. June 2006    Took field notes in second grade
8. June 2006    Interviewed second-grade students
9. June, September 2006 Interviewed second-grade parents
10. June-July 2006 Transcribed data
11. April 2007   Conducted a follow-up interview with the teacher
12. June-August 2007 Corresponded via e-mail with the teacher
Appendix B

Initial Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? What grades have you taught?

2. What is your philosophy about writing instruction?

3. How does your writing pedagogy align with your philosophy?

4. How long have you taught Kid Writing? What do you like/dislike about this program?

5. How has your writing instruction changed?

6. What ideologies/theoretical beliefs influence your teaching?

7. What else could you tell me that would help me to understand how you feel about what you do during writing instruction?
Appendix C

Parent Interview Questions

(Child’s Name) has been actively involved in Kid Writing at school. I am interested in finding out if _______ enjoys writing at home.

1. Does _____ write at home?
   a. If yes, Can you give me an example?
   b. If no, I will prompt with does s/he make cards, write e-mails, notes or lists?

2. What kinds of materials does _____ write with? (crayons, markers, chalk, etc.)

3. What kind of writing does your family do? (grocery lists, cards, letters, etc.)

4. What types of reading materials does your family have at home?

5. Does _______ read at home?
   a. If yes, Can you give me an example?
   b. If no, I will prompt with does _____ have bed time story or do school work?

6. What topics do you and _______ like to talk about?

7. What does _______ like to do for fun?

8. Is there anything else that you can share with me that would help me to better understand your child’s interests?
Appendix D

Second-Grade Student Interview Questions

1. Is writing important? Why or why not?

2. Why do you write?

3. Where do you write?

4. What do you write about?

5. What do you like/dislike about writing?

6. What makes a story or writing piece good?

7. Would you read me one of your favorite pieces that you have written?

8. Why is it your favorite? What do you like about it?

9. Please tell me what you were thinking when you wrote the piece when I was videotaping you? Let’s find it.

10. Do you want to tell me anything else about how you feel about writing?
Appendix E

*Kid Writing* Student Journal Sample

*Figure 1.* Tailyn’s Drawing.
Figure 2. Tailyn’s kid writing and Ms. Newman’s adult writing.

Last night all the crazy, fat, silly, funny stupid people were there. Even the Telav television shin he was a robot slash person. A person had a party in his hat and he had braces, too.
Appendix F

Photographs of Ms. Newman’s Classroom

Figure 3. The Library Corner.

Figure 4. The Word Wall.
Figure 5. Math Vocabulary.
VITA
CAROLYN L. COOK
2007

Education

• Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University: Curriculum and Instruction, 2007
• M.Ed., Shippensburg University: Reading, 1998
• B.A., Washington Bible College: Religion, 1972

Professional Experience

2007 - Assistant Professor of Reading, Mount St. Mary’s University.

1997-2007 Third Grade Teacher, Grace. B. Luhrs University Elementary School, Shippensburg Area School District and Shippensburg University

2001-2002 Adjunct Instructor of Reading, Shippensburg University

1999-2000 Adjunct Instructor of Reading, Messiah College

Publications


Professional Organizations, Offices Held

• Franklin County Reading Council, President elect, 2007

National Presentations

• “Taylor Internships at GBLUES: Benefits of an intensive field placement at a campus laboratory school,” with Dr. Phil Diller at the Annual Conference of NALS: The International Association of Lab/University Affiliated Schools, March 2007
• “Creating a Writing Community Conducive to Learning,” Annual Conference of NALS: The International Association of Lab/University Affiliated Schools, March 2006