READING GENDER(ING) THROUGH PEDAGOGY IN ACTION:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY EMPLOYING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A Dissertation in
Curriculum & Instruction and Women’s Studies

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2009
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ABSTRACT

Feminism as a frame of reference (and feminist pedagogy in particular) attributes the socialization process of gendering primarily to cultural influences and media representations along with attitudes and ideals taught/learned at home. However, schools too are pivotal sites of such social constructivism, particularly with regard to appreciating sex and gender issues. At some level, schools unavoidably do teach such cultural constructions. When teachers neglect to disrupt, challenge, or queer gendered hegemonies (e.g., sex stereotypes, presumed sex role norms, and language representing gender bias), students may read their silence or inaction as an implicit endorsement of such taken-for-granted matters. As such, educators, particularly those in elementary education, have a responsibility to acknowledge and explore the role(s) they play in (or write into) the hidden curriculum of gendering.

Drawing upon video technology, this study describes the pedagogical interactions (e.g., the language of instruction, teacher response, and class discussion) between and among students and their teacher as they negotiate gender-themed works of children’s literature during classroom read-alouds. Specifically, this research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to illustrate how discourses of gender are pedagogically engaged within and throughout such interactions. Four emergent themes of discourse are identified: 1) binary conventions [e.g., constructing activities, perspectives, (cap)abilities, and consequences as gendered]; 2) feminized identities [e.g., princess- and sissy-talk]; 3) designer labels off-the-rack [e.g., using clothing to construct, allow for, motivate, and/or exoticize gendered identities]; and 4) “informed outsiders” [e.g., courtship, marriage, and child rearing as understood by children]. Ultimately, this study aims to encourage ongoing reflection as well as consciousness raising among veteran and preservice teachers with regard to the gendered discourses they might encourage, exercise, and/or exclude as part of their overall instruction, beyond just those lessons that entail reading aloud to others.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Were I to ever conceptualize this dissertation as a film – and certainly it was a production, to say the least – I have to imagine it would be one worth staying to read the credits. Indeed, so many people have played a role in its fruition and I mean to thank them all as best (and as concisely) as I know how to do so.

I mean to wholeheartedly thank each esteemed member of my committee: co-chairs Dan Marshall and Stephanie Serriere as well as Jim Nolan and Lorraine Dowler; each of you has brought tremendous insight and perspective to my writing, my thinking, and my life. Dan, in particular, has been more than generous with his time, energy, editing eye, opinion, and even his (and Tara’s) home whenever I turned to him for help or guidance. Nearly five years ago he offered me a metaphor for what it would be like were I to choose him as my advisor and co-chair, likening the experience to preparing a novice rider for the ultimate first cross-country trek by motorcycle. I am so grateful to have chosen to soak up as much from him as I have, so I am that much more prepared for the winding roads with rough, dark, and/or icy patches that may lie ahead for me. Jim too has been more than a mentor and friend to me, though toward different ends and with a style/care all his own. Just as Heather has two Mommies (Newman, 2000), I can think of no greater pair of scholarly guardians to have watched over me in my time at Penn State (and, I trust, for years to come). Thank you. To my feminist colleagues, Lorraine and Stephanie, thanks too for all you have provided in challenging my thinking, valuing my work, and always encouraging my progress. I could not have asked for more from all of you as a committee. Thank you all.

Forever a student and yet still a teacher, I wish to express my gratitude to the many teachers and students who have inspired me along the way and continue to prod me forward in my work. Had I not taken courses with Marnina Gonick and Lori Ginzberg in the
spring of 2005 – two scholars whose pedagogies and curricula could not have been more
unfamiliar to me – I would never have considered extending my doctoral path to also allow
for a major in Women’s Studies. To my fellow PDS comrades: Mardi, Marion & Mary Beth;
Donnan, Dan (T.), Doris, & Deana; Becci, Bill, & Bernard; Candace & Carla; Jodi & Patti; Ellen
& Lynn, plus my participants and still others (whose names don’t neatly alliterate or
rhyme), it has been a pleasure teaching and learning beside many of you as colleagues and
friends. The enthusiasm of those students and teachers I taught (with) or learned from in
Lancaster, Downingtown, or at PSU have provided much wind at my back all these years.

Here too I wish to thank all my dear friends, family, and loved ones whose support,
understanding, patience, and generosity have provided me more than I could ever
articulate. To all of my fellow “farmhands”, most especially Amy, Dawn, and Larry, I would
like to think the collective loads had been lighter (and more enjoyable) with us lifting
together; may we continue to lift together for years to come. To Harry & Ed, plus Marie, Pia,
& Tiffany – a pair of fabulous grooms and a trio of super-strong women who have always
been there with hearts and hugs to share – thank you for keeping me grounded and, when
needed, pulling my head out of academia, to remind me just who and how I am.

To Rob - my brother/my friend: thank you for letting me realize just who you are as
well. I could not have predicted coming to know, love, and trust you as dearly as I do today.

Most of all, I trust that my doctoral journey would have been not nearly as rich were
I not to have had Brian Jara beside me for more than four years of it. He has been a sounding
board and shoulder at the end of the day, everyday, for more days than I can remember. I
am deeply indebted to him, not only for proofreading the vast majority of this dissertation,
but for also proofreading the countless life decisions I have come to consider, face, and
make in the time that I have known him. Our relationship means more to me than I can say.
Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Throughout history, civilizations have relied upon texts to read and write the sense they make of their world(s).

*From a people’s history, poem, novel, or mystery*

*A fairytale’s nod to “the word of God”*

*Diaries of dire – performance art and satire*

*Cave drawings, artifacts – atlases, almanacs*

*From collections of fables to blogs, charts, and tables*

*Legends and folklore to news media galore*

As cultural teachers and learners, individuals and groups derive their interpretations (consciously or otherwise) in a process of riddling through whatever messages and discourses they find available (to them) in the text itself. I find the ensuing dialogue that often surrounds differing interpretations of shared texts to be particularly ripe for instances of deeper meaning-making to occur – fleshing out contradictions, affirmations, challenges, and expansions while allowing new questions to evolve. According to Chambers (1985), “[i]n every language, in every part of the world, Story is the fundamental grammar of all thought and communication” (p. 59). As such, it seems the storytelling nature of elementary curricula and pedagogy make K-6 classrooms especially interesting.

In particular, works of children’s literature and, more importantly, the discussions that take place around and in negotiation with them serve as rich texts (in their own right) for research. As it stands, children’s literature boasts a massive collection of screenplays and storylines for its audience (presumably students and children, but also teachers and
parents/guardians, etc.) as narratives to take up and explore – where imagination and possibility might dance hand-in-hand. An unrivaled currency in elementary classrooms and curricula, children’s literature affords countless opportunities associated with the teaching and learning process, providing both the platform and the invitation to unearth powerful instances of meaning-making. As a feminist researcher, theorist, and pedagogue myself, I am especially curious about the gendered messages and notions such discussions between students and with their teacher might host – might teach or be learned.

To some extent teachers (perhaps even more so than parents or guardians) are inadvertently positioned to confirm and/or contest the laws and limits of gender on a broader scale; so too are other children and, of course, curricula. Although students are exposed to a myriad of gendering messages outside of school, classrooms provide a space for bringing pupils up to speed with one another – not so much getting everyone on the same page as welcoming all into a shared conversation. When teachers neglect to invite or allow sincere conversation about gender (much less race, class, sexuality, etc.) in their classrooms, they abandon their pedagogical responsibilities at the risk of reinforcing the existent macro-customs of inequity and injustice.

Although gender is socially and culturally constructed, the parameters of its compulsory performance remain both fluid and fragile in its tentative constitution (Butler, 1993, 1999, 2004). What gives gender much of its power and authority is the pretense that it is somehow innate or ‘natural’ – that the rules are fixed and unswerving. Teachers neglecting to disrupt or challenge this pretense might logically be read by their students as implicitly endorsing it. At some level, we unavoidably do teach such cultural constructions in schools – no use pretending otherwise. As

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1 I define gendering as the subtle and elaborately performative process that moves beyond the mere doing of gender to a teaching of how it should (or potentially can and may) be done.

2 “Showing that something is culturally constructed has become synonymous with saying that it is artificial or untrue. However, saying that something is constructed is not the same as saying that it is not real… constructedness is not opposed to real. Rather it is an attack on the very idea of Real… [it] is like what you get when you use a cookie cutter on a freshly rolled sheet of dough. There is no truth to the cookies, and no particular shape was any more inherent in the dough than any other” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 44-45).
educators, we have a responsibility to explore the role(s) we inevitably play in (or write into) the curriculum of gendering we provide.

The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze, interpret, and explain the pedagogical interactions between and among elementary students and their teacher as they negotiate gender-themed children’s books (and gender itself) during classroom read-aloud sessions. Specifically, this research intends to learn how discourses of gender are pedagogically engaged within and throughout such interactions. My research question is as follows:

*How are discourses of gender pedagogically engaged within and throughout the interactions between and among elementary students and their teacher as they negotiate gender-themed children’s books (and gender itself) during classroom read-aloud sessions?*

**Defining Key Terms Central to My Study**

**Classroom read-alouds (as pedagogical interactions)**

Throughout U.S. schools, most elementary teachers routinely make time for read-alouds as a regular feature in their curriculum – ranging typically from one or more sessions per day to just a few times each week. Both the frequency of such lessons and the length/amount of instructional time allotted to each depend largely upon scheduling autonomy (at the classroom level), student age/grade level, and individual teachers’ perceptions of the curricular and/or developmental suitability of available resources. However, beyond recognizing how such pedagogical efforts are customarily an established fixture in elementary classrooms, it seems appropriate to clarify what exactly read-alouds are.
As the name suggests, read-alouds call for one player to read a written text aloud to/for another (Trelease, 1989) – more often than not, a group of others. Moreover, with classroom read-alouds, the teacher-reader assumes a facilitative role, effectively holding court over the given work, as s/he guides its presentation on behalf of and in conjunction with an audience: his/her students (Chambers, 1996). With no more than a carpeted area, chair, and book in place, we essentially have a stage, set, script, and a call for “places!” Teachers tend to hold the reigns of the production, typically acting as both director and star of the read-aloud performance.

Seeing read-alouds within the context of a play-within-a-play structure means recognizing not just what occurs “on stage” but also acknowledging the number of production decisions and designs that occur en route to such a performance. According to Hade:

[C]hildren's reading is shaped by the manners in which writers produce, scholars critique, and teachers mediate children's literature and the assumptions about children as readers held by these adults. (2004, February)

The number of decisions teachers make along these lines include everything from what books they choose (as well as what books they opt not to employ and what books they may be unaware of entirely) for read-alouds, what purposes they intend for specific readings, and how they go about conducting the read-aloud itself. The decision to conduct any given read-aloud may have as much to do with wanting certain topics, themes, and/or discussions to surface around the reading, as they do with conveying specific content or noteworthy ideas and narratives. Baker and Freebody (1989) suggest that when a teacher asks his/her students what they think (during events like these), often the students are as much being pointed toward what the teacher believes they should think – what they should take away/come to know and embrace.

I characterize read-alouds as indeed pedagogical, not only because they are carried out within the educative context of classrooms and schools, but also because such engagements are intended to be instructional in nature – an extension of (and not a break from) the teaching and
learning dyad. Of course, teachers may, on occasion, employ read-alouds for purposes that exist beyond purely pedagogical aims – as a light-hearted break in a hectic day or to help the students unwind as they transition from recess back to seatwork, etc. – but within the context of my research, such unintentioned (or under-intentioned) interludes are simply not pertinent.

Despite the directive nature such a production might suggest, it is important to recognize too where read-alouds deviate from the traditional metaphor of theatrical performance. Less rehearsed in nature than a play or even staged-reading, classroom read-alouds maintain an organic spirit of improvisation, where the audience is simultaneously part of the cast. The interactive engagement invited of both students and teacher (though these roles afford them different powers and privileges, given the conventions of school) have the unique potential to disrupt, affect, extend, and/or steer the written text with their questions, commentary, and voiced connections beyond the book itself. Pedagogically speaking, it is the situatedness of these interactions that are of such interest to me: the potential to invoke a variety of inherently rich discourses between teacher and students around a shared experience and text.

**Discourses of gender (as distinguishable from sex)**

Gender is a loaded term – albeit often misunderstood – that conceptually acts as a governing system for people’s lives and the way they interpret themselves as well as one another (Anselami, 1998c). It is not unusual to hear the terms “sex” and “gender” misused as though the two were synonymous; however, the distinction between them – for starters, that male and female are the two most conventional ways of describing someone’s sex while boy, girl, man, and woman are descriptive terms traditionally employed to indicate one’s gender – is fundamental to my research. In terms of appreciating my research, one needs to understand how I conceptualize gender.
While both sex and gender are social constructions, how societies construct them is an important distinction (Anselami, 1998a, 1998b; Gentile, 1998; Unger & Crawford, 1998). In Western cultures, the boundaries of sex are typically defined discursively in binary terms of biology – with chromosomes, hormones, and/or genitalia seen as legitimating markers to decipher a person’s sex (Feinberg, 1996, 1998; Wilchins, 2004). As such, often people mistakenly think of this as “nature’s way” when, in fact, it is clearly humankind’s way (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1999, 2004; Feinberg, 1996, 1998; Unger & Crawford, 1998; Wilchins, 2004); these distinctions were invented and hegemonized by people as a scientific means of sexual categorization. Such socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity make up many of the discourses that breathe gender into sexed identities (Deaux, 1998).

In contrast with sex, the domains of gender are equally discursive in their construction if less literal and “scientific” in their design. While the regulation of sex is typically constructed within a culture of biology (e.g., male, female), gender is a categorical way of interpreting how that sexed being interacts with the world (e.g., man, woman, boy, girl). “Sex is to nature or ‘the raw’ as gender is to culture or ‘the cooked’ (Butler, 1999, p. 37). The very idea of gender is dependent upon its presumed relation to an ascribed sex; it is how the role of sex is done or played as well as how others come to read the performance (e.g., virgins, vamps, teenyboppers, and tom-boys; clerics, Casanovas, soldiers, and sissies)

According to prolific gender- and queer theorist Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1999, 2004), gender is learned, enacted, or performed, and that performance tends to be both compulsory and unconscious. Among Western middle-class families, for example, it has become commonplace for a doctor’s first diagnostic interpretation of a child’s body as sexed to trigger a series of customary responses: posting decorative signs to decree that “It’s a girl!” or “It’s a boy!” and authorizing an avalanche of pink or blue color choices with clothing and bedroom accessories as
well as a stampede of toys presumed to be most “appropriate” for the (now) sexed baby. Long before the baby has said its first word, parents frequently begin to presume he’s going to smash records and break hearts or she’s going to dance pirouettes and turn heads – as such, they tend to read the child accordingly through these deeply rooted, gender-prescriptive lenses.

Perhaps the most accessible explanation I have found of gender, gendering, and their mutual dependence upon a sexed identity is *X: A Fabulous Child’s Story* (Gould, 1972). In Gould’s short story she exposes the shadowy strings and lines of gender as the reader tries to imagine how much effort would go into living a non-gendered existence (or at least one free from gender’s conventional labels) in a world that seems most comfortable with fixed gender binaries. Gould troubles the idea of whether or not notions of gender are in the interest of children (or anyone, for that matter) at all by demonstrating how undoing gender (Butler, 2004) might conceivably open doors and windows of possibility for uninhibited subjects such as X. However, the angry backlash and ridicule that X and X’s adoptive family (the Joneses) face at the hands of those flustered by their decision to not raise X as a boy or girl (but simply as an “X”) offers some interesting commentary about just how invested societies become in maintaining the hegemony of certain social constructions, illusory or otherwise.

As X becomes old enough to attend school formally, we see that this transition offers a multitude of new and unexpected challenges for the entire Jones family as well as for the school faculty, staff, and administration (Gould, 1972). Despite making proactive arrangements in regard to lavatory use and establishing guidelines by which the personnel in health services must abide (so as not to diagnose X’s sex), it seems there was/is no limit to what small details (e.g., clothing, playmates, interests, and activities) can have gender implications. If it is this much of an effort to avoid gender labels, what might that suggest about how systematically gender is imbedded into traditional schooling when it is taken for granted? Gould’s story provides a satirical vehicle to

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3 Most parents even take offense when others “misread” their son as a girl or their daughter as a boy.
illustrate how many subtle facets of life and schooling are more reliant upon gendered categories than we may realize.

Many people subscribe to deeply rooted assumptions about gender as a “natural” system of government, whether they realize it or not; it is something that one can become so invested in that people become very resistant to those who do not conform. Presuming that children “naturally” gravitate toward peers of the same gender, almost predictably, many of the adults in the story feared that if their daughter or son played with X s/he could become “confused” about his/her own gender. Conceivably, as the story indicates, X is the least confused of all.

A child not so different from any other perhaps, X exists, [by design (Gould, 1972)] as a foreign body in the otherwise-gendered world of the story – a world not unlike the one in which its reader presumably resides as well. In that sense, the X character serves effectively as a text for other characters (child and adult alike) to read, engage with, and respond to – revealing as much about their own gendered presumptions, misgivings, and limitations as those of X himself/herself.

The very idea that X even manages to exist (if only in print ) beyond the constraints of conventional gender inherently demands each reader to confront the necessity of gender as s/he has previously considered it. No one can encounter this story – this character – and simply dismiss the many implications this narrative calls attention to in our lives as gendered beings. Throughout our lives we sign countless contracts in an elaborate negotiation with gender – many of which we may not have even been consciously aware, much less read carefully.

**Negotiating gender itself**

Negotiations are, by definition, process-driven efforts to ease mounting tensions; to decipher discrepancies, settle disputes, and solve existing problems; to prioritize and satisfy competing interests (so much as is possible), and/or to determine the informed direction of future
decisions. Often times the prospect of “negotiating” conjures up imagery and discourse typically associated with the business world: a world of foreseeable costs and gains – projected profits and losses; perceived stakes, risks, and terms of an agreement; mixed motives, compromises, compensations, investments, and (ultimately) settlements. I contend that such factors are no more germane to salary and wage disputes than they are to the personal concessions made and/or avoided in one’s narrative of negotiation with gender – both for our own performative identities as well as how we relate to such performances in/by others. Given that bringing competing voices into harmony with one another poses an arduous task, it is no wonder so many hastily concede to any number of seemingly standardized arrangements, blindly trusting that the fine print attached to precast molds will prove inconsequential. The simplicity of standard protocol, after all, is its efficiency and convenience – designed to deter “unnecessary” considerations as a disruption of/from the routine.

X’s story (Gould, 1972) brings to light the myriad of parameters – explicit and otherwise – individuals face (if often blindly) as they negotiate gender relative to the initial stages of childhood and schooling; suffice it to say, an ongoing succession of such decisions continues throughout one’s entire life. Many adults mistakenly forget the elaborate series of concessions they have made (and continue to negotiate) in order to compose, perform, and convincingly secure their extant gender presentations as though these were fixed and stable identities – innate personality traits even. As time passes, details fade and the lines of self- and societal-interest inevitably blur – guileless of the conditional fine print all around, we take its certainty and necessity for granted. What initially served as innocent suggestions gain credibility with rehearsal, inevitably interpreted and reproduced as though these were in fact law.

Children, by contrast, explore their world still as novice students of it – with a wide-eyed sense of wonder for what it might offer. This boundless spirit of curiosity is particularly evident in the archetypal (i.e., white and middle class) atmosphere of young children playfully interacting
with one another as they navigate the playground at a neighborhood park. With adults congregate in pockets of respite conversation, all the while supervising their cubs’ activity at a distance, children create (in the wake of parent proximity) a space just as fascinating psychologically as the playground equipment is physically: an unadulterated invitation for social inquiry.

Figure 1-1: Making Sense of Birds and Bees on the Playground (Price, 2009, p. 12)

Initially uncertain what shape unstructured play and interaction(s) might take, children explore and interpret those opportunities they find available to them. Through trial, error, observation, and feedback, children inquisitively experiment with regard to their [ever-] gendered circumstances in an effort to negotiate the world around them and their roles within it. Such negotiations are increasingly informed by the recognition of identifiable allowances, rewards, restrictions, and/or expenses emerging as much in the words and actions of children as in their silences and inactions – that which goes unspoken, unproven, or unchallenged. In the whimsically
metaphorical playground of life (and the complex palette of childhood) lies an invitation to consider gender free from the shackles of presumptive authority, regulation, or limitation.

Keeping such a utopian ideal in mind, one must not ignore the fact that children never enter (nor leave) such a park empty-handed. In addition to the toys s/he may or may not have brought along, each child enters the playground already named, dressed, ... and (effectively) gendered, to some degree or another. Their young minds are hardly empty vessels, already affected by their gendered experiences in adult-centered world. Being a boy or girl (or even an X, for that matter) within the mix of other children promises to color the way one navigates that space as well as how others experience him/her; how could it not? After all, from our earliest memories, most of us are/were frequently reminded of our prescribed gender assignments and conditioned to embrace them – taught even to identify others through simplistic shades of pink and/or blue conventionality. Informed by lenses that conditionally reinforce such a normative dichotomy, cognitive development studies (Bjorklund, 2004; Piaget, 1972, 1990; Thornton, 2003; Wadsworth, 2003) suggests that young children will create requisite generalizations based upon their budding awareness and perceptions. Typically, this process initially takes shape as seeing the world in binary form as good or bad, yes or no, mine and not mine - even like me and not like me. It is no surprise that young children are especially susceptible to lessons of gendering (from their peers as well as adults) early on. In light of such simplistic binaries, children stand to associate and negotiate their observations of gendered others with their developing sense of self, taking into consideration the words and language, experience(s), perspectives, and preferences (even biases) familiar to them. In this sense, playgrounds are a wonderful place for children to visit (and expand one another’s spheres of thinking), but playgrounds are not representative of

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4 Go shopping for children’s clothing or toys [the first materialistic possessions with which most children presumably identify themselves – as indeed theirs] in most of the Western world and you will find that to avoid such clichéd identity markers becomes a willful act of disobedience – perhaps especially so for babies’ clothing.
where they actually live. Indeed the influence of one’s home/family environment cannot be overstated in terms of its impact on how children come to read and write gender into their world.

Even the most enthusiastic of advocates for inquiry-based, discovery-oriented learning surely exercise certain precautions at home as they estimate and set cautionary restrictions, for instance, that prevent refrigerator magnets from coming into contact with credit cards, cell phones, or the family computer and prohibit curious hands from introducing household utensils to live wall outlets. For as fascinating and engaging as the principals of magnetism and electricity can be, testing their limits is not without consequence; this too, convention suggests, is true of gender, though such inquiry makes for a differently complex laboratory to contain, within and beyond the home. Societal notions of protection and damage control ferry children along a series of metaphorical guardrails, pink-and-blue bumpers, and rooted tracks systematically established “for their own good.” Although such proactive arrangements may have intentions that are noble [and/or otherwise], they prescribe a normative trajectory – one that relies upon avoiding collisions, discouraging deviations, and keeping cargo safely on the established path – as concerned with protecting the course itself as the vehicle. The presence of adults entering the equation – and in turn, exercising presumed authority – forever changes the way children might negotiate gender.

Structural complications for negotiation

In stark contrast to the playground analogy described earlier, imagine one of those invisible fences where homeowners mindfully bury a coordinated system of markers to stake out a deliberate set of barriers outlining the dimensions of a prescribed area. As independent sensors, the individual components are essentially meaningless. However, once these cues come into
conversation with one another, the synergistic effect is a culture of surveillance with adults (and their fences) standing guard over those in their custody.

This invisible fence metaphor provides a number of powerful parallels to my notion of how gender negotiations commonly occur within the home. The allegory proves especially illustrative when we consider why people use invisible fences in the first place. Primarily speaking, most people who purchase and construct such fences at their homes do so with *pets* in mind – not a democratic decision where the detainee has a voice or vote. Perhaps they worry that the family dog could run away, get into trouble, pester others, or get hit by a car, etc. In any case, the intention is that the fence will assert its designer’s sense of authoritative control – that it will somehow contain what are presumably naïve and simple creatures, forbidding them from following the innate instincts or curiosities they presumably have to locate or situate themselves within a larger, more complex (and dangerous) world. This is not terribly unlike the notion that spanking children will help them *learn* from their mistakes. By strapping a metaphorical shock-collar around someone else’s neck, one attempts to effectively sedate his/her prisoner into submission, systematically stifling any prospect of exploration or negotiation as hopeless.

What I find especially powerful about the invisible fence imagery is that the metaphorical product’s appeal – by comparison with split-rails and stone walls; white pickets and chain links; or even barbed or the smooth-wire fences – quite literally manipulates the mind and eye. Those who install the fence are in complete control of it. They can design its parameters to their liking, however they see fit, yet never be restricted by the fence itself – neither, for that matter, are neighbors or passers-by who may not even recognize the fence is there. By contrast, those forced to wear the requisite collar are conditioned to see (and *fear*) the fence as very much real – even insurmountable. Over time, homeowners may turn off the fence or remove the collars, confident their system has effectively indoctrinated its subjects to yield to its power (within prescribed

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5 I see definite parallels between this idea and Foucault’s (1995) notion of a panopticon of surveillance.
borders): trusting that spirits are broken and enthusiasm for what lies beyond the near and known is curbed. Taught to conceptualize the fence as permanent and unforgiving, they “know” it stands strong and ever-present in their minds; to see beyond such barriers invites confusion akin to Plato’s parable of the cave.

Unlike any cave, home, or playground, schools and classrooms can provide rich contexts for witnessing (and/or participating in) the ongoing negotiation of gender among and between students, teachers, and curricula. Such interactions invite an intriguing fusion of colliding ideals, notions, and performances of gender, all of which social constructivists (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, Wadsworth, 2003) contend weave together in an elaborate tapestry of compelling and influential discourses that demands further analysis.

Analyzing and interpreting discourse critically

Discourse – or “language as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 29) – typically reveals itself in scant collections of related words, phrases, and gestures brought into conversation with one another by means of shared understanding in regard to ways of experiencing and/or participating in the world (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1977, 1980). According to Gee (1996),

Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artefacts,’ of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role. (p. 131)

In this sense, gender itself exists as a discourse, as it informs and intersects with many other discourses as well.

I define discourses as the language-specific rules, patterns, and attitudes – contradictions
even – that lie within written, spoken, and nonverbal exchanges. If, as Kaplan (1990) asserts, texts are indeed structurally multilayered like a thick sheet of plywood – a composite of thinner segments sliding together, with each sliver finding its way into the collective from a new angle and direction – then discourse analysis attempts to describe, interpret, and contextualize (Fairclough, 1989) specific layers in relation to the broader societal messages and contexts they stand to reveal, suggest, betray, challenge, or (in)form.

Discourses both reflect and shape the meaning-making of their participants and readers. Meaning, in this regard, lies not in any text alone, but in the complex interaction between the messages encoded and decoded by each author and receptor respectively (Kaplan, 1990), as well as their performative interpretations of such texts, one another, and in relation to social context.

Discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. (Ball, 1990, p.17)

What constitutes such orders of discourse are “sets of conventions associated with social institutions” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 17).

Never a neutral vehicle for communication (no matter how simple sparse words might initially seem), discourses serve as social transactions that embody cultural, social, and power relationships (Luke, 2004). “Language has become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3). Just as language is implicitly tied to power, so too does it intertwine with ideology. Discourse functions as a means of effectively producing and sustaining power (Fairclough, 1989, 1995), as well as contradicting and changing social relationships of power. Discourse, after all, is never a finished project and despite its social constraints, there remains room for individual creativity, agency, and change within it.

The practice of discourse is both determined by and in a position to affect social structures, whether by extending/continuing existing structures or challenging/disrupting them. In any case, I believe, as does Fairclough (1989), that “language is centrally involved in power, and
struggles for power” (p. 17). My decision to employ a methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA) stems from my feminist commitment to expose and unpack social constructs and power dynamics of inequity, in an effort to find, nurture, and/or create spaces of empowerment as well.

Beyond a customary analytical/interpretive focus on discourse in general, CDA serves as the most appropriate means to recognize, consider, and potentially disrupt entrenched social structures and power dynamics, such as those I associate with gender and gendering.

CDA explicitly intends to incorporate social-theoretical insights into discourse analysis and advocates social commitment and interventionism in research. (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447)

What makes CDA an especially fitting methodology for my study is its intention (and my desire) to bring about a more just social practice of education. In contrast to what Fairclough (1989) contends is the primary goal of discourse analysis,

to help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power (p. 1),
critical discourse analysis aims further to

increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation. (p. 1)
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Framework of understanding

As a feminist theorist and pedagogue, I draw upon a number of schools of thought as I approach my research question. Herein I plan to make clear the metaphorical footpaths I see as logically connecting the collection of theories that inform my own conceptual framework for this project.

Critical theory (hooks, 1984, 1994; Horkheimer, 1982), critical pedagogy (Apple, 1995, 2004; Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1981, 1983; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 1989; Shannon, 1995) and critical literacy (O'Brien, 1994; Shor, 1992) all work to deconstruct, disrupt, and/or dismantle the hierarchical power structures and inherent issues of inequity associated with whatever prey falls within their sites. Moving beyond the presumed goal of traditional theory – explanation – a theory is critical to the extent that it aims to emancipate, “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer 1982, p. 244). Hegemonies\(^6\) abound, awaiting scholars and educational practitioners to unpack them in an effort to more critically read and decode the word as well as the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

According to Ira Shor, critical literacy represents

habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization,

\(^6\) Gramsci (1971) asserts that hegemonies are ideologies masquerading as common sense.
Central to these notions of critical theory, pedagogy, and literacy is the need to reconsider and question the taken-for-grantedness of how we comprehend the world, re-imagining alternative interpretations to texts. It is less about finding a singular, “correct” reading than pointing out perspectives that provide social justice commentary and criticism to enhance or enrich the broader sphere of readings available. Among the key prescriptive lenses that make up the greater telescope of these critical efforts is feminist theory. While my work is inherently informed by critical theory, literacy, and pedagogy, it is feminism specifically that speaks most directly to my fascination with gender and the gendering curricula, as well as the pedagogical implementations and implications of gendered discourses in school settings and classrooms.

It was not until January of 2005 that I first (formally) entered predominantly feminist spheres of academia, but my professional, personal, and political identities have been (and continue to be) forever changed by the experience. While in the second semester of my doctoral program (majoring in Curriculum and Instruction), I enrolled in two courses cross-listed in Women’s Studies: Feminism, Youth, and Pop Culture and Lesbian and Gay History. Only months earlier, my advisor had encouraged me to begin enrolling in courses that might broaden my fields of awareness and kindle my interests in new ways – according to him, my educational choices need not cling so tightly to the security blanket conventions of what any College of Education would likely offer. If this was, after all, to be my education, I ought to consider coloring outside the lines a bit – redrawing them even – as I plotted my program and began to chart my doctoral path.

Up to that point, nothing on my professional transcript bore much of any resemblance to either of those course titles; in part, that was the point – I wanted to step beyond my zone of comfort and familiarity. In many ways, it was an exhilarating experience to imagine taking courses with no explicit connection to their satisfying specific program requirements or clear
utility in my career – not, at least, for all I knew at the time. Finally I was blurring the lines of personal and professional interests in my life, trusting that to do so would inherently be good for me. And thus I began my relationship with feminism, queer theory, and the like – albeit from the shoes of a tourist on holiday. These would, I anticipated, prove to be invigorating spaces to visit (and I appreciated each opportunity to soak up some of the language and culture), still I set no expectation to lay or find roots there. My center of gravity decisively planted on the ‘firm ground’ of thought I was subconsciously conditioned to trust, I planned only to dip my toe in these waters – a brief swim at most; little did I know that I would return to land a different person, much less that I would develop gills of my own.

Indeed, I had underestimated how demanding and rigorous these two courses would prove to be⁷ – never had I imagined, in fact, that any of my coursework would challenge me in such a way as these. More so than with any prior classes, the course instructors, readings, and in-class discussions with classmates pressed me to acknowledge and situate my privileges of position and identity. Topics of conversation moved well beyond the abstract structures and remote out-there s I had become all too accustomed to in my academic experience; suddenly each text and exchange was holding both a mirror and magnifying glass up to me, pressing me to see how my actions, efforts, and attitudes were implicated – how each of ours (including the professors’) were. In time, I found myself ready to take leaps of faith (intellectually, emotionally, and otherwise), surrendering subtle presumptions and conceding to (if not entirely yet abandoning) certain biases I had inadvertently clung to for years – unquestioning and unaware of how deliberately I had come to learn, subscribe to, and indeed reproduce these curricula in my words, thought, and actions.

⁷I say this, not because I anticipated Women’s Studies courses would be any easier, per say, than those offered in any other department, but because I presumed to have a leg up on these topics. Given my established devotion to working with youth, my enthusiastic affinity for pop-culture, and my gay (not yet “queer”) identity, I chiefly expected these courses to affirm many of existent positions on such matters – no more.
Immediately receptive to feminist thinking—though admittedly, much of my previous exposure to it came second-hand, third—even—it was important for me to develop a base understanding of and appreciation for what feminism is, what it was, and what it might be (for me). In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks (1984) set out to define feminism as “the struggle to end sexual oppression” (p. 26), amending this more than a decade later in *Feminism is for Everybody*: “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (2000, p. 1). Despite these notable efforts by hooks, no singular, satisfactory definition of feminism yet exists in the literature—indeed, because there are so many feminisms. Chesler (1997), for instance, maintains, “Feminism is a way of understanding reality” (p. 14); this notion especially resonates with me, considering my own narrative conversion to feminism. Whether one sees it as a struggle, a movement, a way of relating to the world, or something else entirely, feminism as I understand it functions in response to patriarchal structures, systems, ‘accepted wisdoms,’ and dynamics of inequity. Although its rich history is born of women’s movements, feminist theory’s legacy extends beyond matters of gender (alone) to account for complex intersections (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1984; Spelman, 1988) of gender with race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, access, age, and more. Feminist theory itself is the commitment to queer how we socially construct, realize, distinguish, and value identities—how we read, write, essentialize, and/or hegemonize knowledge into, around, and from such gendered identities.

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8 hooks’ words strategically clarify that men are not the enemy of feminism (nor, for that matter, are families and fetuses). This necessary distinction refutes reductionist mischaracterizations and misrepresentations of feminist thought (e.g., the “feminazi” discourse popularized by shock-jock, Rush Limbaugh) operationalized to dismiss the movement’s legitimacy and marginalize its voice.

9 Of note, certain aspects of feminist history ironically are littered with evidence of patriarchy and colonization exercised from within the movement, initially privileging, if not essentializing, only certain representations as the face, voice, or beneficiary of the feminist agenda. Women of color were among the subset groups systemically marginalized by the presumed authority unduly awarded to Western women (Mohanty, 2004) with higher levels of educations, access, and means—effectively reinscribing (and even perpetuating) the same knotty grammar of inequity, hailing power structures feminism proposes to undue.

10 as well raced and classed, etc.
I would be remiss were I to neglect to situate my work and myself as feminist – not merely exhibiting feminist leanings as Magolda (2002) might suggest. Nor do I consider myself a pro-feminist (Kimmel & Messner, 1997) or even meninist. I identify as feminist, wishing neither to preempt nor to take over the feminist movement, but to be a contributing part and student of it. I declare my position, not because I am bound to as a man in, and, or after feminism (Pillow, 2002), but because it is indeed the responsibility of feminist researchers:

[F]eminist theory has been vocal about the need to acknowledge, reflect on, and critically engage the politics of the gaze in our research. (p. 546)

Just as my own conglomerate of overlapping identities colors and shapes the way I come to consider, interpret, and exercise feminism, so too has the integration of feminist praxis in my life and work held tremendous influence on my developing identities – personally, professionally, politically, and (of course) pedagogically. Appealing for a continuous state of reflexivity (Levinson, 1998) specifically with regard to gender, Pillow (2002) continues:

An acknowledgment of the sex through which we write is not a move to free us from our gender. In a world that is not gender-free-to-be-you-and-me, we cannot as researchers expect to somehow write out of or escape our gendered positions. (p. 552)

For feminist scholars, the responsibility is not to neutralize nor erase our differences, but to acknowledge these as important factors implicit in the work itself, all the while, accounting for and/or addressing predictable gaps, limitations, inconsistencies, biases, or blind spots they may present.

\[11\] More specifically, I situate my scholarship and thinking as queer feminist in that I seek to queer – that is to trouble, disrupt, and/or destabilize – hegemonic notions of identity, language, power, and difference (Wilchins, 2004). Although my feminism and politics are informed by queer theory, I position my scholarship as a means to bring such themes into conversation with curricular and pedagogical work, particularly in K-12 settings, where queer theory has had little audience, application, or impact.

\[12\] Of note, these features are not entirely negative.
Along these lines, one of the hallmark ideals of responsible feminist praxis it to refrain from naming or speaking for the experiences of others. Feminist research is nothing if not an effort to empower and inform choices, amplify voices (particularly those who might otherwise be marginalized, hushed, or go unnoticed), and to raise consciousness levels for all of those involved with and/or affected by the research – for those who might come to see themselves more clearly (or even anew) in relation to the research. Ever cognizant of the inherent outsider-within dichotomy (Collins, 1986; Smith, 1990), responsible feminist research respects each participant, affording him/her a locus of culture, perspective, and agency in words, thought, desire, and action.

Reading Ellsworth’s (1989) essay, *Why doesn’t this feel empowering? (Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy)* proved to be a transformative experience for me, as it challenged me to reconsider what I had taken for granted about critical pedagogy in practice. Indeed many professors who wax philosophic as accomplished scholars of critical pedagogy exercise teaching practices that are markedly less progressive or empowering than they presume to represent. Not only have I experienced this personally in a number of courses I have taken within colleges of education, but I have also come to realize that not all feminist instructors in women’s studies practice recognizably feminist pedagogies of the sort they profess to model. When challenged with regard to this hypocrisy, one professor boldly asserted, “If I do it, and I am indeed a feminist, it is feminist pedagogy!” Ironically enough, her argument seems akin to Nixon’s infamous assertion that his discretions with regard to Watergate were not illegal because he did them (while serving as POTUS).

Along these lines of paradoxical praxis, it seems to me a de facto marginalization exists within the language and culture of Women’s (and/or Gender) Studies; moving beyond the ongoing debate with regard to what name best represents the field itself (e.g., Women’s Studies, Gender Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Feminist Studies).
it concerns me that so much of the existing discourse and focus surrounding feminist work neglects to disrupt the hegemony of adult-centeredness\textsuperscript{13}. A cursory survey of feminist literature reveals a persistent representation of children as if they had no agency, insight, or experience to call their own – nothing to contribute. Of note, several feminist scholars (Adams, 1997; Lesko, 1996) recognize adolescence as indeed a social construction\textsuperscript{14} – but fail to extend this notion to account for youth and childhood as constructions as well. Were we, as feminist scholars, to explore the insight children have to offer, who knows what doors that might stand to unlock with regard to the way we experience and understand our world and theirs.

Two feminist scholars in particular are foundational in how I come to conceptualize my research – complementing and extending upon theirs.

**Lissa Paul: Gendered reading of interconnectivity between reader and text**

Lissa Paul situates much of her scholarship (1987, 1997, 1998) at the intersection(s) of critical feminist theory and literacy theory. As such, her work plays a foundational role in my own research. Both a student and professor of children’s literature, Paul brings a feminist curiosity (Enloe, 2004) to her analysis of texts, specifically the written words and illustrations of works published presumably for child eyes and ears. Ever on guard to the structurally enduring and ideologically systemic presence of patriarchy, Paul sees all literature as inherently gendered, combining the worlds of literacy and critical feminist theory to inform the way she reads the world through a collection of strategic and critical lenses:

\textsuperscript{13} I critique this absence/omission as such, cognizant of the recent emergence of both girl studies and masculinities studies – unconvinced that either relatively new area of feminist scholarship accounts for the marginalized voices of girls or boys.

\textsuperscript{14} More specifically, a pointedly contemporary invention of the West, geared to reductively characterize the motivations and confine/profile the actions of a specific subset of the population.
Feminist theory is one of a cluster of discursive practices that reshape the way we read not only works of literature but also our past, our present, and the way we imagine our futures. Deconstructive theory, for example, helps us look at ways words don’t always mean what they say. Reader-response theory teaches that what you see depends on how you look, and on who is looking, and under what conditions. Critical interest in the working of ideology teaches us to look at how beliefs in power and ownership shaped the societies we have inherited. Feminist theory -- like post-colonial theory, like deconstruction -- offers alternatives to totalizing discourses… As a teacher and critic I am learning, slowly, to take notice of texts and ideas I couldn’t see or didn’t notice before; to question the approaches to analysis I used to accept as ‘natural’. (Paul, 1998, p. 15-16)

In her efforts to make the critical feminist curiosity she employs more explicitly clear, Paul names hers as a process of reading differently – as reading otherways.

Paul’s notion of reading otherways is dependent upon a reader’s committed effort to remain alert to a range of possible interpretations for any given text, focusing less upon answers and certainties than questions and relationships.

To read “otherways” for many if not most of today’s adults involves a process of unlearning. Trained as we were to delve into the still pond of correct interpretation, we are just learning to swim in the ocean of possibility. (Paul, 1998, p. 3)

Paul would contend she is not looking to alter the authors’ words or images so much as to reveal and decipher a plethora of alternative messages within them. In her willful attempts to read a given text otherways, Paul considers a network of critical questions¹⁵ she brings to each reading in an effort to probe beneath surface-level understandings.

¹⁵ e.g., “whose story is this? who is the reader? when and where was the reading produced? who is named? and who is not? who is on top? who gets punished? and who gets praised? who speaks? and who is silenced? who acts? and who is acted upon? who owns property? who is a dependant? who looks? and who
In my eyes, what distinguishes Paul specifically from many other critical theorists and literacy scholars who investigate children’s literature (e.g., Hade, 1992, 1996; Meek, 2001) is her unwavering commitment to interrogate and unpack matters of gender with(in) each reading. She describes her relationship with feminist theory (1997, 1998) as pivotal to how she came/learned to read the world otherways, acknowledging the hidden doors and blind-spot pockets of shadow it has illuminated for her – has obliged her to consider. As such, Paul has chosen gender as her central focus for critical analysis, seeing it as part and parcel to the broader, critical feminist agenda and her role within that.

With the curious eyes of a feminist, Paul directs her concentration toward employing gendered readings to every text, deconstructing the inherently gendered message within each. Beyond asking where are the women (and girls)? and what’s the story with them? (as many feminists do across any number of research fields and disciplines), Paul sifts through the politics of dirt (1997) and seeks to excavate what’s happening with gender?, what’s constructing it?, who and what is/are defining gender?, for whom?, why?, and for what (if not always ‘whom’) is gender assigned, asserted, challenged, critiqued, or disrupted? For instance, Paul (1987) problematizes the hegemonic marginalization and entrapment of children (as well as of children’s literature), as naïve, dependent, and/or derivative realities with neither voice nor intention to their credit. She draws parallels to the peripheral status women (as well as women’s literature) have experienced and continue to experience at the slight of patriarchy and the presumption of male privilege. Interestingly enough, the reading audience for most children’s literature promises to be predominantly women and children, making children’s books an opportune vehicle for hegemonic indoctrination, sites of resistance, or a fusion of both.

is observed? who fights for honour? and who suffers? how are value systems determined” (Paul, 1998, p. 16)?
Drawing upon the fundamentals of both reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1938) and post-structuralism (Foucault, 2003, 1978), Paul (1997, 1998) characterizes the text-reader dyad as one of bidirectional inter-connectivity. In short, just as the reader “reads” the text, so too does the text “read” the reader. As reader-response theory acknowledges, each reading audience brings an assortment of lenses with which to consider, decode, deconstruct, and decipher any given text; post-structural theory tips its hat to the unique baggage and stories each reader brings to the text as well – we, like the published text, are never entirely fixed nor finished and we have not one author but many. Taking this a step further, just as the written/illustrated work is a text and each reading audience is a text, the dyadic interaction of the two becomes a third text (see Figure 2-1). In the case of Paul’s scholarship, it is this third dyadic text – the sense-making process serving as a by-product text worthy of reading as well – that I value most about Paul’s writing, reading her “take” on a given work as well as what it suggests about her.

"What you see depends upon who is looking, when, and from what ideological vantage point." (Paul, 1998, p. 10)

Just as the reader "reads" the text, so too does the text "read" the reader.

Figure 2-1: Bidirectional Inter-Connectivity
In *The Politics of Dirt*, Lissa Paul (1997) draws upon her own gendered readings of Zion’s *Harry the Dirty Dog* (1956) and *No Roses for Harry* (1958) paralleling Harry’s relationship with dirt as an assertion of his masculine identity and his distaste for taking baths or wearing a hand-knitted sweater (with roses on its design, no less) as a rejection of the feminine. Were I to have come to either of these texts on my own, I may have missed these alternative readings. By contrast, in this case Paul neglects to explicitly draw the connections to race and class I might have seen as prevalent in regard to notions of being *dirty* as well as dressing up one’s physical representation (or rejecting such a costume as unfit). Still, what I may have interpreted as classed or raced and she as gendered seem more compatible than not – that is to say that gender is inherently raced and classed as race and class so too are gendered. Moreover, Paul’s feminism accounts for, acknowledges, and embraces such overlaps.

Despite it’s usefulness, Paul’s model (see Figure 2-1) falls short of meeting my conceptual needs on three counts: 1) the bidirectional inter-connectivity of her reader-text dyad presumes an independent reading audience of one; and 2) that one is an adult. Typically, Paul casts herself in the role of reader – even though children’s literature is written primarily for a child audience. Thus, while an understanding of how one (literally one) reads a text – and more specifically, constructs and/or interrogates notions of gender from/within that text – is inherently foundational to my inquiry, such a dynamic falls short of where I direct my own feminist gaze. I am curious also about how an audience of children come to make sense of gender through the vehicle of a shared children’s text in dialogue, dissonance, and/or debate with one another. This brings me to the third key departure from what Paul alone may offer: while Paul theorizes about this bidirectional inter-connectivity, she does so vis-à-vis the strengths and limitations of herself – her own experience. Such readings lack any regard or account for empirical data or research.

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16 In fairness, I read Zion’s *Harry the Dirty Dog* (1956) and *No Roses for Harry* (1958) admittedly after reading *The Politics of Dirt* (Paul, 1997).
beyond themselves; I say this not as a critique of Paul but in clarification of why and how I must
look to the work of others as an effective continuation of hers.

In addition to Lissa Paul, I find the work of other feminist scholars equally compelling,
though for somewhat different reasons. In particular, I especially value the efforts of feminist
researcher and scholar, Bronwyn Davies (1989, 2003; Davies & Harré, 1990; Davies & Kasama,
2004). Davies’ work is pivotal to my conceptual framework as it helps to address certain gaps left
by Paul, both theorizing and empirically exploring the sense children make of gender as they read
and respond to children’s texts. Two of Davies’ studies (1989; Davies & Kasama, 2004) in
particular attempt to empirically capture how bidirectional inter-connectivity works and plays out
among kids and books.

**Bronwyn Davies: Collective mosaics of child-reader discourse and gender-themed texts**

Like Paul, Davies is a feminist scholar and theorist who situates gender as central to her
research agenda. Furthermore, both Western women explore gender in relation to how it is taken
up and/or (de)constructed in relation to works of children’s literature. Davies’ work (1989; 2003;
Davies & Kasama, 2004) acknowledges and indeed draws upon the bidirectional inter-
connectivity of literacy Paul describes as the relationship between the reading audience and the
text. Like Paul, Davies also employs post-structuralism, albeit in markedly different ways.

Although each woman names herself and her work as feminist, the two take up and
perform their feminisms with separate and distinctive trajectories. Paul situates her analyses
within the broader field of critical theory and literacy theory while Davies is a post-structuralist
and empiricist at heart – for as much as a post-structuralist can abide by or ascribe to such labels.

By comparison with Paul, whose critical gaze is fixed primarily within the children’s texts
themselves and independent readings available within them, Davies explores the discursive
exchanges around gender-themed books among small groups of child readers interacting with one another in dialogue about their evolving understandings and interpretations of what they have seen and heard. Less driven toward critique per se, Davies’ agenda seeks to surface how children arrive at what is there, in order to understand, though not necessarily to challenge, condemn, or correct it. While Paul looks inward at the text and the reader, Davies looks outward toward the multiple discourses and readings at work (and at play). In short, the two feminist scholars differ in terms of their missions and projects.

More so than with individual interpretations of text, Davies is particularly curious about the social phenomena of multiple parties and perspectives making sense of gender together: social constructivism17 (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Whereas Paul attempts to impart the feminist insights, observations, and gendered analyses she arrives at in personal dialogue with a text, Davies strives instead to get out of the way (so much as is possible). A fly-on-the-wall observer, she attends to the multitude of discourses parties adopt, consider, dispute, and/or dismiss as they collectively conceptualize and negotiate the constitution of gender itself; all this inter-thinking18, mind you, occurs in parallel discussion of, with, and in response to the narrative catalyst of a given children’s text.

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17 In choosing to focus upon pre-school age children (and attempting to all but remove adult influence from these discussions, or as best she can) she stands to expose what notions of gender “stick” or “ring true” with kids – what realities and social constructs young children invent, embrace, reject, or confuse when left to their own devices. Davies (1989) explains,

I chose children of this age because they have moved outside the family circle into the more public worlds of preschool and thus had the experience of elaborating their identities in a context wider than their immediate family circle. The contrasts and contradictions they have inevitably met in their extension of their interpersonal world meant that they had quite a lot to say about being male and female. (p. 28)

Unlike Paul, Davies questions the very certainty, necessity, and inevitability of gender\textsuperscript{19}. This is not to say she dismisses gender; on the contrary, Davies takes gender very seriously, though not for granted. She is curious about precisely how it manifests itself and holds meaning – how gender is called into being and takes shape. Rather than privileging any perspective (even her own) as expert, Davies means to explore the far-reaching possibilities of situations that might better empower children with the capacity and license to distinguish, dismantle, disrupt, and/or disallow the dominant storylines and hegemonies through which gender (as they know/experience it) is held in place.

Drawing largely upon two of Davies’ specific research projects\textsuperscript{20} – what she refers to as her two “Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales” studies (1989; Davies & Kasama, 2004) in particular – provides useful scaffolding for the development of my own conceptual framework in the sense that she situates these empirical investigations so as to more pragmatically observe and consider how kids interact with children’s literature and one another, giving voice to some of their budding ideas about gender. The research contexts for both “Frogs and Snails…” studies shine their spotlight(s) on the world of preschool children from Australia (1989) and Japan (2004). Although Davies would certainly agree with Paul’s assertion that every text is gendered (as is each sexed, raced, classed, etc.), with great intention she opts to use what I call gender-themed children’s books – “feminist tales” as Davies names them\textsuperscript{21} – in particular for her study,

\textsuperscript{19} Davies sought to recreate her earlier Australian study (1989), in Japan (Davies & Kasama, 2004), this time traversing the East-West divide in hopes to explore the cross-cultural constructions of gender.

\textsuperscript{20} Ever the post-structural, feminist empiricist, Davies has conducted a number of avant-garde studies to interrogate the way children come to construct, enact, cement, and/or expand their notions of gender in different situations, not all of which necessarily draw specifically (nor equally) upon children’s literature as vehicle for this. For instance, in certain studies she also explores their play at recess or how kids write gender into existence as authors, etc.

\textsuperscript{21} According to Davies, Feminist stories for children are generally of two kinds. The first is where the subtext is turned into text – the story becomes a story about gender [e.g., Oliver Button is a Sissy (de Paola, 1979)] … The second kind of a feminist story is where gender relations remain the subtext, but where the
believing (among other qualifiers) such texts to be predictably “more useful in generating discussions in which the children’s understandings of gender could be elaborated” (1989, p. 49).

To Davies it only made sense to select narratives that dealt directly with such pointedly “feminist issues” (p. 49) as the necessity, prevalence, and/or critique of performed masculinities, femininities, and/or gender role norms. Such concepts were central to the storylines of each qualifying feminist tale: 

Oliver Button is a Sissy (de Paola, 1979), The Princess and the Dragon (Wood, 1982), Rita the Rescuer (Offen, 1981), and The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980) – all of which Davies estimated to have been written with an audience of four- and five-year old children in mind.

Interestingly enough, selecting participants this young calls for an expanded understanding of what reading itself is. Four- and five-year old children are typically not yet familiar enough with letter-sound relationships and decoding skills to decipher entire narrative stories on their own. As such, positioning them as the reading audience of such gender-themed picture books calls for an adult (or at least an independent, presumably older) reader to serve as a facilitative medium for the group, narrating the written text to provide greater accessibility between the young reading audience and the published text. These adaptations pose significant challenges to Davies’ study of the dyadic “third” text between reading audience and published text (see Figure 2-2).

metaphors through which the children have come to understand being female or male are shifted, such that a new kind of narrative is made possible [e.g., The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980)]. (Davies, 1989, p. 47-48).

In response to finding Davies’ notion of “feminist tales” (1989) too abstract and subjective for my research purposes I coined and developed the term gender-themed texts (Reilly, 2007a).

22 In the second “Frogs and Snails…” study, Davies and Kasama reduced the pool of books to just use (the available, translated publishings of) Oliver Button is a Sissy and The Paper Bag Princess with the Japanese preschoolers.

23 much less situating small groups of them as collective reading audiences

24 who actively participate, reading both the written and illustrated texts along with the facilitator
"Using... their conversation and their responses to feminist stories... provides both fascinating detail of the gendered world of childhood and new insights into the social construction of gender." (Davies, 1989, back cover)

Children employ rich and compelling discourses of meaning-making in regard to gender as they "read" gender-themed texts in dialogue with one another, particularly if adult reader-facilitators on hand allow them to do so - getting out of the way (so to speak) without intervening in presumed authority of the text or proper readings, etc.

Figure 2-2: Social-Constructivist Meaning-Making and Interthinking Literacy

With a clear intention to keep the focus purely upon the children’s perspectives, Davies’ research design choices speak to a deliberate attempt to disrupt the conventions of formal schooling from intruding upon each reading. For example, with each of the “Frogs and Snails...”
studies, Davies and her research teams deliberately construct the adult reader as pointedly not one of the (preschool) teachers but a member of the research team. The researchers also situate the child participants in small, itinerant focus groups of three or four, not as students per se, nor as fixed reading groups, much less as an entire class unto themselves.

Recognizing the complex arrangements of power dynamics commonly at play within classroom spaces, formal curricula, and student-teacher relations, etc., Davies brings focus to her interest in the dyadic “third” text under construction between the published text and her young reading audience by controlling for or neutralizing these dynamics instead (see the suggestion of veiled purple and green lines in Figure 2-2). Rather than present specific interpretations of or prescriptive lessons from the text as a teacher might do (consciously or otherwise), Davies’ adult readers resist taking hold of or steering the reading act itself—stifling metacommentary. In the spirit of neither intruding nor imposing their beliefs upon the children, her adult readers also commit to openly accepting the sorts of responses most preschool or elementary teachers would never tolerate. For instance, the non-authoritarian adult did not intervene when one child suggested Oliver Button deserved to be beaten and bullied because “He is stupid—!” nor when another added, “It’s disgusting pretending to be a girl! ... His father might not like a girl” (Davies & Kasama, 2004, p. 40). Instead, the adult reader only asked the two students to elaborate upon these comments—to draw out their thinking.

As an elementary educator and supervisor of elementary preservice students, I can admit that reading some of these remarks made me squirm—particularly in light of knowing they went

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25 As opposed to someone who regularly works at these preschools, with whom the children might have come to understand as an authority figure who instructs or corrects or otherwise treats them as students, enforcing consistent management or discipline strategies or holding preschool behavioral expectations, etc.

26 A second pair of students explained that if they were Princess Elizabeth [at the end of The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980)], they would slap, hit, and stab Prince Ronald to death. One remarked “I will make him completely naked” and the other added “I throw away the fancy pants and I cut his penis off” (Davies & Kasama, 2004, p. 67). It just so happens that these shocking (albeit unchallenged) comments in particular, as well as the aforementioned ones expressing disgust toward Oliver Button all came from small groups consisting entirely of girls.
unchecked. However I think it is important to appreciate the rich opportunity Davies’ research provides for teachers like me to eavesdrop on some of the blatantly gendered readings of and responses to gender-themed books that children may make on their own; perhaps such remarks and others like them simply go unsaid when a teacher, parent, or authoritative figure is present. In drawing back these curtains as Davies has, adults may be newly privy to the conversations and discourses their mere proximity might otherwise inhibit.

Whereas Davies opens doors and windows to shed new rays of light upon children and their (de/re)constructions of gender, she does so by stifling the inherent effects and agendas characteristic of actual classroom spaces and the circumstances of formalized teaching and learning. Indeed, her efforts to deliberately unschool the circumstances of her research run contrary to my specific research interests. For these reasons, I mean to undo the very controls and constraints Davies affords, returning to the more naturalistic setting of a classroom and its pedagogical interactions and asking: How might a focus on a teacher’s facilitation of whole-class discussions alter/affect the overall equation?

Although the word generally carries a negative connotation, part of teaching is indeed posing interference. As teachers, we push. We challenge. We unsettle. We feel and we definitely judge. We voice concerns when we have them and we do our best to intercept potential actions or words we worry may hurt or be dangerous to others; it is all part of the job. The same duty that implores us to seize “teachable moments” as they arise (e.g., disputing any rationalization for bullying, much less dismembering another person) also beseeches us to facilitate dynamic discussions, stage engaging experiences, and relay stimulating stories. When Davies’ adult reader becomes the teacher, the reading audience becomes a class of students, and the published text becomes a book shared during a read-aloud – and everything changes.
Extending the conceptual framework: Read-alouds

Owing to the belief that they are valuable experiences for any number of reasons (Trelease, 1989), as noted in the definitions section of Chapter One, classroom read-alouds have increasingly become a strategic staple of most any elementary teacher’s pedagogical inventory. In fact, according to Chambers (1996),

every child should hear a piece of literature read aloud every day. Certainly, no teacher should be regarded as competent who does not ensure that this happens with the children in her charge. (p. 49)

To neglect read-alouds entirely would seem unusual to me, particularly in the elementary grades – a missed opportunity for the sort of casual pedagogical interactions many teachers and students especially value. Typically, preservice programs prepare elementary teachers as curriculum generalists, responsible for facilitating instruction across a myriad of subject-area topics, units, themes, and grade-level competencies27. As such, most elementary teachers I know confide that part of what they appreciate most about read-alouds, beyond even the charm of the stories themselves, are the communal intimacy and relative informality of the experience they provide.

In contrast to subject-area lessons in mathematics, science, etc., elementary teachers oftentimes look to read-alouds with a broader sense of ease. Trusting the narrative structure and illustrations to provoke meaningful discussions (as well as the teachers’ instincts for responding to and facilitating these), there is often less lesson to preemptively plan for these events. Yet while read-alouds open up a space that invites organic and impromptu discussions, they do so within a shared culture of schooling – one in which the book, the audience, and the teacher/reader all have roles to play within the classroom environment. Pedagogically speaking, classroom read-alouds are, like everything else that goes on, about teaching and learning.

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27 satisfying state and national standards in preparation for standardized accountability measures
In discussions, the teacher becomes less a director of learning and more a facilitator. In many ways, this role is more difficult because the teacher has less control over the lesson’s direction and pace. Nevertheless, the teacher’s role remains critical, for the teacher must ensure the promotion of learning through student interaction and exchange of ideas. This can be accomplished by the teacher carefully initiating, informing, supporting, monitoring, and evaluating the discussion activity. (Jacobsen et al, 2009, p. 270)

In spite of how effortless the practice might seem, it is important not to miss the subtle and sophisticated phenomenon of pedagogical interactions and discursive engagements at play during classroom read-alouds. Although neither Paul nor Davies refers to read-alouds specifically in their research or scholarship, the read-aloud, as I am conceptualizing it (see Figure 2-3), provides an authentic pedagogical situation that inherently draws upon their work. Paul’s singular adult reading audience takes the form of the elementary classroom teacher, whose bidirectional interconnectivity and rapport with the text (having pre-read it on his/her own) informs his/her decision to use/teach it in a classroom read-aloud. So too does Davies’ constructivist reading audience of multiple children play a role in this phenomenon, though classroom read-alouds situate them as a complete class of students with whom the adult reader takes a more active and purposeful role as their teacher. This teacher-students (teaching-learning) rapport promises to affect the nature of the discourses individual students take up with one another as well as those used in dialogue with their teacher as they co-construct meaning from/with the text and from one another.  

28 Having read the text prior to facilitating the actual read-aloud, the teacher seems positioned to hold a different level of currency in this co-construction, presumably having not only familiarity with the text and the positional authority of teacher status, but typically s/he literally holds the book itself and controls the pace and performance of all its readings during the read-aloud.
"The goal is not to pack into our traveling bag only the best that has been thought and said but to find forms of critical talk that will improve the range or depth or precision of our appreciations." (Booth, 1988, p. 133)

"[We set out] to develop a kind of conversation that might get somewhere - not just sharing of subjective opinions but a way of learning from one another." (Booth, 1988, p. 421)

By providing the naturalistic context of a classroom read-aloud, we devise clearer pedagogical and constructivist implications for the discourses at work/play around and in response to gender-themed books as part of a broader triangular phenomenon.

Figure 2-3: Pedagogical Interactions and Discourses of Engagement

[vis-à-vis Classroom Read-Alouds]
In *Shards of Glass* (2003), Davies acknowledges “the complex interweaving of teacher and textual authority” (p. 45) as discussed by Baker and Freebody (1989). According to these scholars:

we can see how the teacher assumes an interpretative posture between the story and the child, inserting comments into the reading of the story... These insertions comprise the teacher’s metacommentary, which is a feature of reading instruction throughout school life. Such a metacommentary does not appear merely to parallel the text, but… to penetrate and shape the text. Thus it is a metacommentary not only on the text itself but on the social relations in which school learning from text will occur. (p. 164)

To be clear, I contend that this teacher metacommentary – purposefully, habitually, or otherwise – shapes and colors the read-aloud experience. Not to be outdone, students individually, and even more so collectively, exercise their own considerable license in read-alouds as well, steering the conversation with the questions they ask and comments they make.

Indeed, it is these very kinds of responsive interactivities between adult and children, and specifically teacher and students, that Davies sought to neutralize in her “Frogs and Snails…” studies – a rich, new “third” dyadic pedagogical text that I believe warrants deeper scholarly investigation. With each successive figure I have introduced, I follow the spotlight’s path from Paul’s interest in the interactions between an adult reader and gendered text (see Figure 2-1), toward a second, more complicated focus by Davies on how children respond to gender-themed texts (see Figure 2-2). With Figure 2-3, I mean to shine my own research spotlight on the

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29 Likewise, I believe it is important to acknowledge that much of human behavior is, in part, performantive. In other words, what any given student or teacher says does not always reflect the complexity of his/her thinking. Situated as s/he is, one might perform his/her role strategically so as to be read a certain way by others. Any given student may feel s/he knows the kinds of responses his/her teacher is looking for, as well as perhaps, what s/he might say to a peer when adults are likely to be out of earshot. Teachers too may feel the need to play the devil’s advocate in debate with their classes or perform the roles of model citizens in school, only speed, smoke, or have an affair on their way home from school that day. This is not to say that every word and behavior is suspect or jaded so much that these situated discourses are potentially multi-layered and that one would be foolish to presume his/her loan reading of these exchanges as texts will ever duly capture the picture.
bidirectional pedagogical relationships of the two previous dyadic texts coming into dialog with one another to inform the remaining “third” text (or green line) constructed by a teacher and his/her students. It is this co-constructivist meaning-making of gender-themed narrative picture book texts undertaken among and between teacher/reader and students/audience that I wish to investigate and explore. Just as Paul theoretically deals with engaging texts and the way texts engage us on a personal/individualistic level, and Davies seeks to better understand children’s social-constructivist meaning-making in response to a shared text, I believe contextualizing a meeting of the two in the naturalistic setting of classroom read-alouds is a promising continuation of their scholarship, brought more directly to education in a formal sense.

According to Paul, “the problem with looking through feminist eyes… is that you begin to see things you cheerfully ignored before” (1998, p. 17). Although I draw inspiration and a sense of duty from Paul’s words, I think it is important for feminism and feminist pedagogy to move beyond the project of critique. In contrast to focusing upon the texts themselves – in this case a succession of gender-themed children’s books – and how different sub-audiences ascribe and divine meaning with them, I wish to use these books as an invitation for discussions of gender itself, and in turn, a launch pad for gendered discourses to emerge.

Along these lines, I make the distinction to use gender-themed texts as categorically different from their binary counterparts: gendered peripheries. I define gender-themed texts as those in which the performance of gender(ing) blatantly emerges as a central area of conflict in the text’s storyline, often because one character questions or critiques how another does gender, “correctly” or otherwise. Gendered peripheries, by contrast, are those texts where most readers would not likely see gender as playing a central role in the narrative - where gender is situated in the plot’s periphery. Within gender-themed texts, gender is so explicitly central to the plot –

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30 At the time I coined and developed these terms (Reilly, 2007a) in response to finding Davies’ notion of “feminist tales” (1989) too abstract and subjective for my research purposes.
either named as such or addressed openly within the narrative of the texts – that one cannot feasibly escape the gender troubling discourses these texts invite without actually taking liberties to sensor or skip certain passages of such books. Thus my choice to employ determinately gender-themed picture books for this study was a deliberate attempt to stimulate and capture predictably gendered discourses situated in response to them in the context of classroom read-alouds.

I situate my investigative position not from the armchair of a critic, but from a chair in the faculty lounge of my practitioner comrades whose investigation intends to learn as much from as it hopes to inform practice. Focusing pragmatically upon the pedagogical (and subsequently curricular) implications of what discourses are made available, taken up/exercised, embraced, critiqued, dismissed, or rejected in these interactions, my research stands to inform practice as much as it does theory. Thus, my aim is to describe, analyze, interpret, and explain the pedagogical interactions between and among elementary students and their teacher as they negotiate gender-themed children’s books (and gender itself) during classroom read-aloud sessions. In short, I hope to learn how discourses of gender are pedagogically engaged within and throughout such dyadic interactions. In Chapter 3 I elaborate upon my research design and methods toward these ends.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

Like Davies before me, I set out to employ a multiple case study design, gathering various data in order to more closely consider how discourses are exercised, employed, and/or engaged pedagogically within each case. Having defined discourses already in Chapter 1, I contextualize them as part of my data collection in the midst of exchanges between students and/or with their teacher around gender-themed children’s narratives.

Situating my study within the context of a K-12 school district

Nestled hours inland in a rural-suburban setting within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, few could deny that the prestigious Publish-or-Perish University (POPU) is a pillar of pride relative to the scenic expanse of the Pleasant Gorge area. As can be expected, the neighboring Roosevelt Area School District (RASD) surrounding this land-grant institution (with a student body nearing 45,000 in number) is undeniably influenced by the famed university’s larger than life presence. More than a college-town atmosphere in the immediate Roosevelt borough, the research university is the single-biggest employer in the county. As such, the vast majority of students throughout RASD have family members who work (or have worked) at, attended, or are currently enrolled at POPU; with more than 150 majors from which to choose, POPU has much to offer.

While the educational value of POPU is not lost on RASD, the university recognizes and appreciates that it has much to gain from its association with the district as well. As such, for more than a decade now, POPU’s College of Education and the Roosevelt Area School District
have enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with one another – collaborating upon the creation and operation of professional development school (PDS) collaboratives, both at the elementary/middle and secondary levels. The elementary PDS program, in particular, has received several national honors and awards; still, these distinctions are not what have proven to be the partnership’s greatest sense of pride. The PDS’s shared sense of history and time-honored commitment to fostering an atmosphere of inquiry and educational renewal, where theory might meaningfully inform practice and practice can authentically shed new light upon or shape theory: those are its proudest accomplishments.

Having dedicated four years of my doctoral efforts to working within the POPU-RASD elementary PDS as a course instructor, practicum supervisor, in-service facilitator, Critical Friends Group (CFG) participant, and researcher/presenter (among other de facto problem solving roles and duties), I learned firsthand how powerful a site this is for research. My experience working within this PDS has afforded me tremendous opportunity; not only have I managed to forge and develop fruitful relationships, but I have also piloted studies (Reilly, 2007b) there and (more than that) developed my professional reputation and credibility throughout the district. Pairing these riches with the culture of research, reflection, and renewal embraced throughout much of the district, I could not ask for more accommodating circumstances for situating my research investigation as I set out to design and conduct my study.

**Selecting texts paired to specific grade levels**

Accepting Davies’ assertion that certain books qualify categorically as “feminist tales” (1989) and joining other researcher-practitioners (Lowery, 2002; Rice, 2002) whose work presumes certain children’s books do (in practice) successfully generate rich class discussions that speak explicitly to matters of gender, I amassed a large collection of narrative, gender-
themed (see Chapter 2) picture books for use in read-alouds. Having conducted two earlier pilot studies with preservice and practicing K-5 teachers throughout Roosevelt Area School District\textsuperscript{31}, I found that third grade teacher-participants seemed most willing and comfortable integrating the majority of gender-themed books\textsuperscript{32} I compiled and made available to them\textsuperscript{33} for use in their classrooms as read-alouds. As such, I decided to situate my investigation in third grade classrooms\textsuperscript{34} at RASD.

Gina Whitman, an experienced RASD third grade teacher and participant in one of my earlier pilot studies of this nature, generously agreed to advise me with regard to narrowing the pool of books I planned to make available to each participant for this study\textsuperscript{35}. Together we made a concerted effort to consider the district’s third grade curricula and the state standards as well as the specific developmental age, maturity, and readiness levels of eight-, nine-, and ten-year old children in our selections. We also took into account a range of student reading levels, the length of books, and a variety of teacher tastes and personalities. In concert, Gina and I chose the following nine children’s books we felt made available a range of narrative structures, themes, character representations, topics and styles (see Appendix A): \textit{Aani and the Tree Huggers} (Atkins, 1995); \textit{The Brave Little Princess} (Masini, 2000); \textit{Horace and Morris but Mostly Delores}

\textsuperscript{31} All names of children, educators, schools, districts, universities, and local roads/sites are all pseudonyms.

\textsuperscript{32} Looking to see whether such texts (themselves) would inevitably evoke more explicit discussions of gender (as I suspected they might), so as not to affect participants’ readings, I did not indicate or clarify to participants that I considered each of the available books to be a gender-themed text.

\textsuperscript{33} In each of my pilot studies, I made a point of bringing the same collection of 10-20 books to each classroom, regardless of grade level, because I did not wish to allow any of my own presumptions about curricular, grade, or age-level fit to cloud or otherwise affect each teacher’s prerogative to select any given book.

\textsuperscript{34} It is important to keep in mind the context of what it means for these students to be in third or fourth grade as opposed to Davies’ choice to collect data among preschoolers. By third grade, we can presume most students are experienced students of school itself and the dynamics of teacher-student relationships.

\textsuperscript{35} Gina’s involvement in helping me determine the most appropriate books for this study prohibited her from volunteering as one of the cases in this study.
(Howe, 1999); *Kate and the Beanstalk* (Osborne, 2000); *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980); *The Princess Knight* (Funke, 2004); *Rotten Ritchie and the Ultimate Dare* (Polacco, 2006); *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002); and *Sleeping Bobby* (Osborne, 2005). By thinning my original collection of gender-themed texts to this set of nine, I hoped to strike a balance between allowing participating teachers a sense of choice in determining what they would (and would not) like to read aloud to/with their class, while increasing the likelihood for overlapping book selections between classrooms.

Booklist in hand, the next step was to take each of these gender-themed texts through RASD’s mandatory approval process in order to get each book registered and endorsed for use as a read-aloud36 in third and fourth grade classrooms37 throughout the district. This process entailed having at least one elementary librarian, one curriculum support teacher (CST), and two experienced division-level classroom teachers (no less than four faculty members throughout the district, in total) read and review all of the texts, evaluating each for grade-level appropriateness, curricular fit, literary value, etc. I sent an additional three books through the process, just in case any of my initial nine were rejected – fortunately all 12 were approved38, so I moved forward with the nine district-authorized texts Gina and I had previously chosen.

36 According to the curriculum support teachers I spoke with in RASD, the reason for such an approval process – and, to be clear, there are separate (albeit less restrictive) approval procedures for determining which books can be shelved in/checked out from school libraries throughout the district [though no such clearance procedures exist yet to determine what individual teachers may fill their classroom shelves with from their personal collection] – is that RASD recognizes read-alouds (as do I, see Chapter 1) as teacher-facilitated lessons. More specifically, conventions of schooling suggest that students are expected to adopt the role of a captive audience to read-aloud books as a pedagogical point of entry for class instruction. By contrast, books children may or may not self-select from school or classroom libraries presumably do not officially enter the sphere of formal curricula, for which students are held accountable to learn.

37 In RASD, grades three and four make up the “intermediate division” and most curricular decisions regarding district resource appropriations made at this level treat the two grades as one level.

38 For more information regarding the evidence of subjectivity in this approval process, see Appendix B for an illustrative anecdote.
Establishing criteria for participant sites and divining a process for narrowing the pool

Booklist in hand, the next task was to coordinate and determine participant cases. In May 2008, I distributed an email announcement (see Appendix C) to all RASD third grade teachers\(^{39}\), asking for participant volunteers who met all of the following criteria:

1) Each participating teacher must currently teach his/her own class of third or third and fourth grade RASD students.

2) S/he must have at least two years of experience planning for and instructing third grade students in RASD.

3) Each teacher-participant and his/her building-level principal (see Appendix D) must agree to allow me, as the researcher, to videotape\(^{40}\) a four-episode series of classroom read-alouds in each participating classroom over a period of approximately four to five weeks during October and/or November 2008.

By focusing upon those who had at least two years experience teaching third grade within the district, I felt I could safely assume that each participant was familiar with the district’s grade level curriculum and national/state standards. Likewise, having planned and facilitated successful lessons for eight-, nine-, and ten-year olds, s/he would have been in a position to make informed choices about the books s/he chose to incorporate and how to best approach conducting read-alouds with them. Too, the fact that this would all take place near the beginning of a school year suggested the teacher-student and student-student rapport may have still been taking shape, but

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\(^{39}\) excluding Gina Whitman as well as the two other intermediate-level teachers (Erin Peterson and Florence Timmons) who participated in the approval process for the books in this study

\(^{40}\) As with two other read-aloud pilot studies I had conducted in this district, I agreed to situate the video camera and tripod so that it would consistently face the teacher as s/he facilitated each read-aloud, catching only glimpses of student shoulders and the backs of their heads primarily, so as not to betray their relative anonymity as learners. In addition to these, by then, routine precautions, the RASD school board conditionally consented to my video data collection plans, provided each participating teacher was able to successfully collect parent/guardian permission slips for each child prior to any taping.
with a full month of the school year behind them already, there should have been a common understanding of one another’s roles within a read-aloud context for that classroom.

Although I had initially intended to collect data during the closing months of the 2007-2008 school year, receiving the school board’s endorsement of my study required me to push back my data collection efforts to the fall of the following school year; this meant teacher-participants who had expressed interest in May were likely to have a different batch of students come fall. Of note, two teachers who had volunteered to participate in May no longer expressed interest when fall came. In one case, the teacher felt the individual personalities and needs of students in her (new) class demanded considerably more time and energy than her previous class required. Another teacher – initially the only male who volunteered for my study – retired at the closing of the 2007-2008 school year. By contrast with those initial volunteers who no longer felt their situations were a match for the study, Paula Freedman was perhaps the exception to this rule. A teacher who had looped with her then third grade students to fourth grade for the 2008-2009 school year, Paula expressed continued interest in being a part of the study, so I did not immediately eliminate her from the pool of potential case participants41.

Once I had collected the names of interested volunteers, double-checking that each met the established criteria, I transferred each of those names to individual slips of paper, color-coding them by the schools where they work before placing them in a container for use in the random selection42 of three differently-colored slips of paper43.

41 I was, however, cognizant that if I did, in fact, collect data in Paula’s classroom, I would need to account for a number of predictable issues that stood to color and shape such data.

42 The primary reason I elected to draw the three names at random was to keep the chief focus off of whom each teacher is/was – his/her personality and teaching style, etc. – as well as what his/her class was like (e.g., their reputation or demographics). To be clear, mine is a study about the discursive interactions that take place among and between the collective protagonist identities involved, not the individual or collective protagonists themselves; while acknowledging my entire conceptual triangle (see Figure 4, in Chapter two), the spotlight belongs not on any of the specific corners, but upon the pedagogical blue leg in particular.

43 My reasoning for this is that I noticed in one of my pilot studies, when I had two classroom teachers from the same building participating in the study, they were more prone to discuss the research project with one
Having randomly selected three likely participant cases – Fern Taylor, Rachel Perkins, and (sure enough) Paula Freedman – I employed a book-selection system that I had designed earlier to inform the elimination of one of these three women. Prior to scheduling or taping any read-alouds, I circulated the bin of nine district-approved books, affording each prospective participant a 24–hour window to look over the texts and rank them according to preference, from one to nine, with nine being the one she would least prefer reading aloud to her class. They were to do this with the understanding that I would not ask them to use any of the books they respectively ranked as seven, eight, or nine. By design, these rankings would permit me to ensure that the eventual pair of participants would share at least one text in common and at least one that was unique among the books they ranked highest. Using each teacher’s book-selection preferences, and in consultation with my advisor, I set out to determine the two teachers whose choices best matched these requirements and most compatibly permitted each one to read as many of the books she ranked highest (individually) as possible.

When it was time to pour over the their book rankings, I found myself reconsidering my options, specifically with regard to whether or not this ranking process would prove to be the determining factor in deciding who to eliminate from this study. It seemed as though good fortune smiled upon the study as I noticed that I could compatibly pair any two of the three finalists with one another, and indeed have each reading three books from their top five, with two matches (see Table 3-1).

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44 As there might have been any number of reasons that inform individual participants’ rankings, I allowed them to elaborate on these choices on the actual book ranking survey sheet as well as at a later point in the study, during their follow-up interviews.

45 To me, it seemed important to recognize the role of the teacher’s sense of choice in what she, as a classroom teacher, selects to pair with any class, day, or lesson so she might exercise some degree of agency in, ownership of, and enthusiasm for these pedagogical experiences.
Table 3-1: Book Rankings and Compatibility Check

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<td>5</td>
<td><em>Kate and the Beanstalk</em> (Osborne, 2000)</td>
<td><em>The Princess Knight</em> (Funke, 2004)</td>
<td><em>Horace and Morris but Mostly Delores</em> (Howe, 1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Horace and Morris but Mostly Delores</em> (Howe, 1999)</td>
<td><em>Kate and the Beanstalk</em> (Osborne, 2000)</td>
<td><em>Sleeping Bobby</em> (Osborne, 2005)</td>
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In light of this, I decided it was in my best interest to collect data in all three rooms, staving the decision to eliminate any of the cases until other factors (e.g., scheduling difficulties, technical problems with recording, or other unforeseen disruptions that stood to contaminate data samples) might surface.

Coordinating schedules and circumstances for the data collection process to begin

Having assigned three gender-themed picture books for each to read, the next step was to pull together the final details in regard to data collection procedures, scheduling, and the like. Via email I arranged face-to-face meetings with each teacher (at her convenience) in her respective classroom. Just as I had hoped to clarify any procedural loose ends for and with each participant (e.g., distributing and collecting signatures on the informed consent paperwork for IRB) I also needed to get a sense of what to expect in terms of the predictable procedures associated with classroom read-alouds in each room. For instance, we determined where and how best to situate the tripod and video camera as well as where to place the wireless extension microphone so that it promised to be “in the mix” of class discussion in each room. Likewise, we needed to arrange tentative dates and times to schedule all read-alouds to occur (as well as just-in-case back-up dates) in the coming weeks. Once I had met each case participant and taken time to consider my options, I got back to each teacher with a comprehensive and compatible schedule to cement these dates (including no fewer than two back-up dates) on one another’s calendars (see Appendix E for a general outline of my data collection schedule).

My decision to collect data across a series of read-alouds in each classroom stemmed from my belief that doing so would allow me to more accurately capture an authentic
understanding of how interaction, interthinking, and discourse regularly occur around classroom read-alouds in each respective classroom space. In contrast to Davies, who meant to unschool the preschool space, I hoped to minimize the effect my own research presence might have in terms of altering or disrupting the naturalistic space of each classroom. This effort began with a procedural pilot round.

During my one-on-one planning meetings, I asked each teacher to select any narrative picture book with which she felt comfortable facilitating a first (of what would be a total of four) read-aloud(s) – one that need not have any direct nor intentional connection to the other nine featured in the bin I had provided. Beyond this I wished to have nothing to do with directing (or affirming) their selection of such texts. What mattered most was that this first read-aloud served as an effective dress rehearsal of sorts, helping to familiarize the teacher and students (as well as me) with the related research procedures in an authentic context, while effectively working out any initial kinks for all parties involved.

Building in devices for consideration of raw data and preliminary analysis

Once all books were identified and all read-alouds scheduled, I proceeded to collect my video data. Following each read-aloud, I had asked each teacher to briefly reflect upon the experience, either in writing (submitting these to me via email attachment) or by recording their

[46] It has been my experience that with once-and-done observations, when a stranger brings in his/her video camera and tripod to collect data from a classroom full of elementary students, the presence of such foreign bodies may read as an intrusion upon the climate or a contrived surveillance of the space (at least initially) to some students and teachers, affecting their behavior and inevitably changing the experience as a whole. It seems that both the researcher’s and camera’s presence tend to be less noticeable after the first (and with each successive) observation.

[47] To be clear, the expectation was not for them to select these books immediately, during our one-on-one meetings, but at some point prior to the first scheduled read-aloud.
reflection in the style of an informal audio podcast or vlog⁴⁸. As time and technology allowed, I encouraged them to do this as soon after conducting the respective read-aloud as reasonably possible; ideally this would occur within a 24-hour turn-around window, but as can be expected with busy teachers’ schedules, this was not always the case.

As soon after recording the series of four read-aloud episodes and receiving teachers’ reflections as was feasible, I provided each participant with a CD containing four folders, one corresponding to each read-aloud episode, as well as a fifth file indicating their initial book ranking information (see Figure 3-1). Just days before Thanksgiving break, as I distributed these personalized CDs to the teacher-participants – theirs to keep – I asked each to review the content on her CD within a week’s time as a means of refreshing her memory of her involvement in my study (and each lesson, etc.) dating back to the selection of books.

![Fern Files on CD](image)

Figure 3-1: Sample Organizational Chart for Files on CD

Following their review of the above materials I conducted one 45-minute debriefing

⁴⁸ I had made arrangements each time for teacher-participants to use Garage Band or the iSight function in iMovie on my MacBook Pro laptop to briefly reflect upon the lesson almost immediately following it – provided they could arrange for their own class coverage as needed. Otherwise they would need to wait for a planning period, lunch, recess, or after school should they wish to reflect in this manner. The goal was for this to be as convenient an option for the participant as possible so I offered any of these options.
session/interview with each participant. I used this time to allow each teacher to comment on anything affirming, contradictory, new, or otherwise noteworthy about what she may have noticed in any of the data files on the CD. Additionally, I asked them to elaborate on any recent or new understanding(s) they may have gleaned from or during the experience of conducting these read-alouds, as well as any detail(s) they could remember concerning what the audio or visual equipment may have been unable to capture or that I simply may not have known. I videotaped these interview sessions (providing the teachers with these recordings on a second CD as well) and, like each of the recorded read-aloud events, had those files transcribed to assist with my analysis.

**Forms of data treatment and investigation**

In the end, postponing the verdict on which of the three seemingly compatible cases I would eliminate proved to be a wise decision for the study. Had I rushed the ruling I feel certain I would have regretted it; nonetheless, it was important to make the selection before analysis could begin. As it happens, during one of the read-aloud sessions in Paula’s room, the audio track cut out entirely for more than a ten-minute spell. It seems the wireless extension microphone mysteriously lost communication with the camcorder midway through the read-aloud and much of the discussion was lost. Although Paula and I did our best to recreate as much of the conversation as we could the next day – the equivalent of redubbing the “silent movie” sections of footage with our make-shift reenactment commentary – we both acknowledged that we were unable to salvage a word-for-word account of what each child said (and how). Given the fact

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49 It is still not clear whether or not this was an inadvertent power button bump or a faulty battery life issue.

50 Despite Paula’s impressive recollection of many savory details and my running notes which provided a skeletal sequence to the general discussion – both of which proved very helpful - it did not help that the children’s faces did not appear on screen.
that this study sets out to explore discourse, and do so in considerable detail, this was significant. Fortunately, none of the other data I collected (neither with Fern’s nor Rachel’s classes) were nearly so compromised as this, so it seemed only logical to remove Paula’s data set from the focus of this study: case closed.

Figure 3-2: Forms of Data Collected (for Each Case)

Having collected all the above data (see Figure 3-2) and finalized the cases of value to the study, the next step was to coordinate and collate that raw data so as to bring the many distinct pieces and forms of information into conversation with one another. This entailed both taking into consideration the data forms or mediums as well as their design purposes and functions.
Primary data set

My major task, of course, came in working with my primary data set: the video footage of each classroom’s four read-aloud episodes. For this, I used Studiocode software to mark and sort the video data. Studiocode’s sophisticated technology affords one the opportunity to experiment with video data with an elaborate series of intricate codes, text labels (or coaxial codes), and matrices for analytical purposes. The matrix function in particular has fantastic potential in terms of allowing me, as the researcher, to isolate seemingly separate instances and exchanges (e.g., just the references to masculinity and/or femininity), effectively pull those coded events together into a compressed dialogue – a veritable highlight reel of events – to illustrate whether or not patterns of behavior, action, or attitude emerged discursively. In this regard, transcribing each of these read-aloud episodes proved especially helpful as well. While the footage across and within read-aloud lessons proved to be rich for any number of reasons, my analysis of this data set focused, by design, upon discourses of gender.

Multiple secondary data sets

Beyond the video footage from the eight read-aloud episodes themselves, I had three secondary data sets to consider as well. It was important to treat each of these data sets with its own integrity. Rather than simply unfolding the same codes and/or themes I had found useful in analyzing the read-aloud footage via Studiocode, the secondary data sets received their own unique consideration, and although overlaps of one kind or another were inevitable, each also had the legs to stand alone as a complete data set in its own right.

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51 having found it to be a powerful tool for data treatment previously in several of my related pilot studies

52 In Chapter 5 I elaborate on the codes I found to be most effective for my analysis in this study.
Among the secondary data sets, the reflections that followed each read-aloud episode were unique in that they initially left things rather “up in the air” on a number of counts. Firstly, they allowed for each teacher to determine whichever reflective medium(s) – e.g., written journals, audio voice-recording, or videotaped footage – she would prefer to use throughout the process. Although, by design, the teachers need not have committed to just one medium (individually, or in agreement across participants) for these reflections, it just so happens that each participating teacher consistently elected to type these up after school as journal entries, submitting them to me via email. Treating these data as unique, I scoured through each text set a number of times looking for patterns, trends, themes, or codes to emerge directly from the reflections themselves.

A second reason for which the reflections posed unique opportunities among the secondary data sets is that I could have considered them in two markedly different ways (depending upon the actual data I collected). One option was to approach each individual reflection in tandem with its particular read-aloud. In doing this, I was likely to draw clear parallels between some of the discourses exercised in a given read-aloud event and the brief, follow-up reflection upon that day’s reading. A second option was to consider each teacher’s four reflections as a data set in its own right. I explored both of these options.

A second data sub-set was the research log and reflective journal that I maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. Although the mediums for this varied between written reflection and vlog-style field notes, I needed to read and treat these personal data anew. Rather than simply imposing any extant codes upon these data, I explored the available themes that emerged as I revisited my own data again and again.

My third data sub-set consisted of the culminating/final interview conducted with each

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53 As anticipated, I employed both Microsoft Word and the iSight feature on my MacBook Pro laptop to debrief individual data collection events as soon afterward as possible. Throughout my pilot studies, and here as well, I found it helpful to do this on my laptop in my parked automobile, before leaving the site.
teacher following her review of the files on CD I provided. Videotaping this culminating interview with each participant permitted me to employ my Studiocode discourse categories. Although I was able to find some earlier codes and themes surfacing in these interviews as well, as I expected, the analysis of these individual interviews was also inherently different. Likewise, the personalized questions I prepared for each interview (see Appendix F) as well as any further reflection or clarification the participants offered both affected and informed how I approach coding and treating this secondary set of data.

Concluding Thoughts

I believe it is important to acknowledge still another methodological facet of this study – one that I am both grateful for and still I find infinitely complicates my work in ways I have yet to fully wrap my head around: my relationships with the participants. The fact that I knew these teachers as well as I did prior to the study – that they were more than my “participants” but colleagues (and even friends)\textsuperscript{54} as well – inherently colors the data itself and shapes any analysis of it they or I might offer. There are nuanced power dynamics attached to how we relate to one another as well as to one another’s work\textsuperscript{55} that I continue to riddle through/wrestle with in light of how I come to appreciate and approach such data. I worry, for instance, that my familiarity with them – feeling indeed that I know these participants – might subconsciously invite me down paths where I inadvertently position myself to speak for them. As both a flawed and feminist researcher, I wish to make every effort in my work to acknowledge the agency and voice of each participant (be they child, adult, or what have you) as inevitably beyond my full understanding, but still worthy of my consideration to inform my analysis.

\textsuperscript{54} I elaborate upon these relationships in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{55} This much perhaps affected even \textit{why} each teacher offered to participate in the study (e.g., a favor to a friend versus seeing this as an opportunity for professional development – I suspect a bit of each).
Having clarified and elaborated upon my research design and methodology I move in the next two chapters through data collection and analysis. I dedicate Chapter 4 to contextualizing each of the cases involved as well as to situating the children’s books and their facilitation as read-alouds. By contrast, Chapter 5 focuses directly upon my analysis of the pedagogical discourses exercised throughout these read-alouds, clarifying the codes I drew upon and the themes I discovered.
Chapter 4
Contextualizing the Cases, Texts, and Data Collected

This purpose of this chapter is to both situate and contextualize the data I collected as a part of this study, prior to its subsequent analysis in Chapter 5. For as familiar as I became with the classrooms, schools, students, teachers, and texts involved, it seems only responsible for me, as a researcher, to introduce the reader to relevant case factors prior to introducing the data or my analysis of them.

Of the third- and fourth-grade teachers in rural-suburban Roosevelt Area School District (RASD) who initially volunteered to participate in my study, I carried out the procedures detailed in Chapter 3 to determine which teachers and classes would serve as my two participant cases. In the end, my narrowing process led to a pair of talented and dedicated teachers, each with her own teaching style, each at different stages of her teaching career, and each teaching at a unique school site whose demographic profile stands in marked contrast to the other.

Of note, the two cases shared much in common as well; both were third grade classes of a similar age (eight- and nine-year-olds) and number (approximately 20 students per class) that happened to be working on the same thematic unit of the district curriculum during the weeks of data collection: Japan (and the countries of Asia). Likewise, both teachers regularly allotted time for no fewer than four read-aloud sessions in their respective weekly schedules. Also, just two years earlier, these two teacher-participants had worked down the hall from one another, as part of the same intermediate division team then at Kennedy Elementary.

Something else these two women had in common was that I had worked closely with each, albeit in different ways and times, as part of the Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between RASD and Publish-or-Perish University (POPU). As appropriate throughout
parts of this chapter, I elaborate upon the nature of these relationships relative to how I understand each case. In Chapter 6, I revisit how such relationships (as well as other related factors and/or limitations) may be seen as both complicating and enriching my study in a number of ways.

**Case One: Ms. Rachel Perkins’ Third Grade Classroom at Kennedy Elementary School**

Simply driving by, much less walking into Kennedy Elementary, it is not difficult to see how this site stands in contrast to many of the other schools throughout the district. Having worked in the building myself for more than two school years, I know first-hand why so many people find Kennedy to be unique. Located just minutes from the center of POPU’s enormous campus and near a particularly commercial section of North Commerce Avenue, Kennedy is not more than a few blocks from a variety of stoplights, POPU shuttle stops, and steady streams of traffic – especially on weekends when major sporting events and concerts, etc. draw thousands of people to POPU.

Unlike most areas of the district, many people who live nearest Kennedy Elementary itself can walk (should they choose to) to a number of nearby restaurant-, fast food-, or hotel/motel chains, as well as to drug stores, pizza parlors, convenience stores, and strip malls. A university shuttle comes through the Kennedy area regularly throughout the day and evening, and many locals use that for much of their transportation needs. All things being relative and in a university town area, the neighborhood immediately surrounding Kennedy is among the most developed (industrially/commercially) in the district – not particularly “urban” by standards.

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56 then as a methods course instructor and supervisor of student teachers throughout the course of a yearlong PDS internship
beyond that of the local area, but more “urban-suburban” than the settings for the other seven K-5 schools in RASD.

To be clear, in addition to the fixed-/low-income communities, predominantly college-style apartments, and mobile home park options available, most of the families with students attending Kennedy Elementary live in the more conventionally suburban neighborhoods that extend beyond the more commercial vicinity nearest Kennedy itself. While these middle/upper-middle class neighborhoods are more representative of the majority of RASD overall, Kennedy remains rather unique geographically when compared with the rest of the district.

What surely makes Kennedy Elementary more noticeably distinctive to anyone who walks its hallways is the student body, reflective of the diverse communities of its surrounding geography. There is significantly more racial/ethnic diversity visible in this building than most any other elementary building in the district (except perhaps Buchanan Elementary, which has somewhat similar geographic dynamics in that it, too, is within walking distance of POPU’s campus). As compared with most school sites throughout the district, where 85-95% of the students identify as white/Caucasian and 83-94% come from middle-class (or wealthier) families, Kennedy and Buchanan are unique in that approximately 23-25% of the student body are children of color (see Figure 4-1) and 19-28% of the participating families are economically disadvantaged (see Appendix G). Moreover, a large percentage of the local Kennedy community is comprised of families affiliated with POPU (e.g., university faculty, staff, maintenance, graduate students) or local/commercial industries. As such, they tend to represent a broad range of income levels. I know of several professors as well as a district judge whose children attend (or have attended) Kennedy. I also know many doctoral students (often from other countries, a

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57 To be clear, I am describing a difference in the student and parent/guardian population, not so much with regard to the faculty or staff.
statistic true of many professors as well) whose children attend this school. When compared with most of its peer schools throughout the district, Kennedy indeed stands out.

![Average Figures Across RASD Elementary School Sites](image)

![Kennedy Elementary](image)

Figure 4-1: Comparative Representations of Ethnicity at Kennedy Elementary

In terms of the building itself, Kennedy Elementary is an older brick building full of energy, humidity, and creative problem solving. With air conditioning in only a few isolated
rooms, were it not for the ceiling fans mounted in most every classroom, hot days could be particularly unsavory for students and teachers alike. Many of the grade levels (including third grade) eat lunch in their respective classrooms because there is simply not enough space in Kennedy’s humble multipurpose room during periods of the day when it houses physical education classes as well. As such, teachers at Kennedy Elementary have shown themselves to be very resourceful in maintaining student focus and making the most of their instructional time.

Having worked throughout the RASD I also know much about the reputation of this building, and many of the most decorated and recognized teachers in the district – a number of whom have instructed or co-instructed university courses – happen to work there. Kennedy Elementary is an exciting place to teach, known for its inclination toward inquiry-oriented pedagogies as well as cultural curiosity, consideration, and celebration.

In addition to recognizing the school as unique, the teacher-participant in my first case, Ms. Rachel Perkins, is rather remarkable as well. I have known Rachel for nearly five years now, meeting her initially as a PDS colleague who taught elementary methods courses and supervised student teachers throughout the district with me. Since returning to her 3rd grade classroom, Rachel and I have stayed in touch with one another both professionally and as friends, checking in on one another’s health and personal relationships as well as just to tease each other for our identifiable idiosyncrasies. Toward that end, Rachel falls easy prey to being mischaracterized (for the sake of humor) as absent minded. She brings great enthusiasm and creativity to much of what she does, but Rachel admits she can become so swept up in the excitement of a good discussion,

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58 The collaborative PDS partnership between Roosevelt Area School District and Publish-or-Perish University allows experienced classroom teachers like Rachel the professional development opportunity to leave their classrooms for multi-year rotations (typically a two-year interval) and take on instructional and supervision responsibilities before returning to the classroom. These unique professional development opportunities can be highly competitive, as there are only two or three available at any time.
experiment, lesson, unit, or project that she loses track of time, not to mention her keys... or purse... or glasses... or writing utensil, etc.

Of note, Rachel was recognized with a teaching award her first year back as a classroom teacher and has a reputation for cutting-edge pedagogical experimentation\(^{59}\) and inquiry-based curricular innovations\(^{60}\). Upon her return to the classroom (certainly a full time job in its own right) she continued, intermittently, as a co-instructor for an undergraduate science methods course after school each week. Never one to stop learning or challenging herself, Rachel’s most recent action research inquiries have incorporated Studiocode software and video data analysis strategies to more reflectively understand (and improve upon) certain content discussions she facilitates with her class. In fact, I initially anticipated that Rachel might be especially tuned into how talk plays out with her students, given that she has commented upon her deliberate efforts (this year, in particular) to get as much meaningful participation from as many of her students as possible. During her follow-up interview with me, after having watched the four read-aloud episodes I recorded in her room (and provided to her on CD), Rachel shared that she had taken detailed notes, applying even some of the codes she had been developing for her inquiry investigation; when I asked if she might share these with me, she was happy to do so... would that she could ever only find them. Classic Rachel.

Another aspect where Rachel seems unusual is her interest in transnational and social justices issues. I happen to know she owns and wears a “Well-behaved women seldom make history” t-shirt and does not blush at the idea of identifying as a feminist. Too, I know Rachel to be passionate about environmentalism and naturalism – even raising hissing cockroaches with her class each year. Rachel has a gift for studying and celebrating world cultures, saving money for working trips (“unconventional vacations” by most Western standards) to locations where she can

\(^{59}\) e.g., incorporating podcast technologies with her third-grade students

\(^{60}\) e.g., conducting/presenting reflective action-research/inquiry studies each year
work with causes she believes in; among these trips she spent time in India working with a local women’s organization on social justice and equity issues.

Another point I feel compelled to acknowledge, in regard to my pre-existing thoughts on Rachel’s involvement in my study, is that I held a different expectation for what I anticipated seeing/hearing in her classroom. This suspicion was in fact validated by one of the members of my dissertation committee on more than one occasion. This professor suggested I might wish to specifically select teachers who would predictably conduct read-alouds in an especially socially just and gender-conscious manner, each time citing Rachel as one such example. Like me, this committee member had worked with Rachel for a number of years (he longer than I even) as a fellow instructor/supervisor and as a parent, as she taught one of his children when they attended Kennedy Elementary years ago. Also, like me, this professor keeps in touch with Rachel both personally and professionally; that’s perhaps a testament to Rachel’s personality and presence that those who know her come to know her well. Still, I did not assume that any of these endorsements meant Rachel was necessarily better than any other prospective teacher-participant in my study, nor that there is a “best” way to conduct such read-alouds and related discussions. However, it is not difficult to imagine great things of someone a researcher knows well, thinks highly of, and views to be dedicated to matters of social justice and equity, particularly if those are ideals the researcher shares deeply.

Entering Rachel’s classroom for my first day of data collection, I found it full of excitement and activity (as expected). I tried to make myself as unnoticeable as possible, finding my way to where Rachel and I had previously agreed would likely be the best place to situate the tripod and camera. One thing that was definite was that the kids did notice me as I heard many enthusiastic interjections about the video camera. I guess I figured that the novelty of a camera and tripod’s presence in Rachel’s class was likely to be minimal since she used video data collection last year with her inquiry study. My sense was that she had not yet used a video camera
with this year’s class much, if at all, because they initially seemed as intrigued and excited about it as any other class might. I remember hoping that my conspicuousness would fade (and, indeed, I believe it did) as I continued to collect data in the weeks that followed.

As I set up the tripod and camera behind and off to one side of the reading areas, I was reminded straight away of the “house” in Rachel’s room, positioned as it was across the carpet from where I stood. For years now, Rachel has had a simple/adaptable two-story/level wooden structure (approximately 6’x6’, with the height varying in places to nine feet). Throughout the year, she and her students would makeover the structure’s facade with each new corresponding curricular unit (e.g., redesigning the exterior to look like a Victorian home, a Japanese teahouse, or an adobe-style dwelling, as appropriate). When I arrived for the initial read-aloud the house was a barren skeleton. Throughout my weeks of data collection I came to see the transformation of the structure into an impressive teahouse design. Moreover, this house often served purposes beyond the decorative or curricular; it proved a highly-coveted place for students to go inside to read or work on projects during low-structured times of the day. Within the bottom level of this structure (regardless of its thematic facing at any given time), sits an enormous beanbag chair. Whenever Rachel calls students back to the read-aloud carpet a new pair of students typically would lounge on the beanbag chair – a rotating luxury option Rachel afforded to students during each read-aloud, provided they stay on-task, focused, and completely engaged with the reading and discussion. Knowing Rachel as I do, it was no surprise that her students were not expected to neatly fall into positions that clearly resemble rows or columns. Instead they spread out in a scatter plot that looks rather random. The seating arrangement I observed that first day (see Figure 4-2) – by no means a standard, for Rachel assured me ahead of time that her classroom

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61 Although students generally may sit within the “house” structure throughout most lessons, it just so happens that this was only an available option for students during the first of Rachel’s four read-alouds. Throughout the other lessons, the teahouse was generally in too much of an “under construction” state (in progress becoming the teahouse) for students to comfortably inhabit it. Rachel assured me that, for the vast majority of read-alouds in her classroom each year, her students are generally free to occupy the house.
had none – reflects what Rachel estimates to be most typical for how read-alouds most commonly occur in her classroom.

Figure 4-2: Sketch of Sample Seating Patterns Observed in Rachel’s Room

In terms of any rhyme or reason to the seating, I did notice that stage left of the carpet area (particularly between the teacher’s reading chair and the house structure) was noticeably more congested than the stage right side, where students (almost entirely boys) were more likely to spread their bodies out to recline. Nearly all of the girls in the class sat in this more congested area, with none of them farther right than center during most any read-aloud lesson. The two boys in the teahouse, sitting on the beanbag chair (at the extreme stage left) appeared to be rather spread out as well, sit-laying stretched across the beanbag chair. Consistently, most of the misbehavior I noticed Rachel addressing – sometimes redirecting students to sit elsewhere – fell on the stage right end of the carpet, aimed typically at the boys touching or whispering to one another, despite being at a distance from their neighbors.
Another observation I made in terms of students, space, and management concerned six students identifiable as children of color: two African American boys, one boy whose family remained citizens of the United Arab Emirates, and three East Asian American children, one of them a girl. Of these students, only half – namely the three East Asian American children – were present for each read-aloud in its entirety. These three tended to sit between stage left and center stage left in the congested area of the carpet, though not necessarily beside one another. The two African American boys and the boy from UAE often missed significant portions of all but the first read-aloud, leaving the room for learning support, ESL/ELL, or catching up on other activities in the hallway that they had missed earlier or had yet to finish.

Beyond the physical layout of the classroom and class, I was able to discern a few identifiable points that speak to how Rachel approaches read-alouds in general with her class. Given that she often scheduled read-alouds at times some students would predictably need to be out of the classroom, capitalizing upon these as times to have her student teacher catch students up on what they may have missed at another point of the day, it seems Rachel does not approach read-alouds as akin to other lessons which could not be missed or must be made up, etc. This is not to say, however, that Rachel sees read-alouds as less than other whole-class pedagogical opportunities in terms of their instructional merit and value. In fact, Rachel typically pairs each read-aloud with a follow up activity or series of learning events, often literally shifting from a position seated near one part of the reading carpet to read, to still another where she can stand beside an easel and pad, scribing the class’s ideas in such a way that students might more readily draw out big ideas from their understandings. Rachel regularly makes a concerted effort to

62 Of note, however, Rachel asked to reschedule her second read-aloud as the original date and time we selected would have meant a number of students who receive Title I services would miss much of the read-aloud and return to the room midway through the lesson. Because Rachel worried these variables stood to overly-complicate the lesson for it to serve as valuable data collection we rescheduled the read-aloud for a few days later. During that read-aloud, the three boys who most frequently missed read-alouds in Rachel’s room did so again; she disclosed that their missing read-alouds was not on par with a conflict with Title I.
integrate concepts from across multiple subject areas, drawing meaningful connections to earlier lessons and unit-related discoveries as opportunities arise. These discussions are intended to connect directly to larger class projects and ongoing academic content understandings.

**Case Two: Miss Fern Taylor’s Third Grade Classroom at Jefferson Elementary School**

Walking down the dimly lit hallways, over/across the waxed, wooden floorboards throughout Jefferson Elementary provides a nostalgic experience unlike any other; as several of the teachers and student teachers who work there have indicated, *you might as well be walking back in time.* While I am certainly at ease in Jefferson, having attended dozens of meetings or professional functions there over the years, I am not nearly so familiar with the intricacies of the building or its local community as I am with several other buildings throughout the district, where I have worked more regularly. As such, I draw here upon colleagues and coworkers who do or have called Jefferson their professional home, to help me get a better appreciation for, and describe, what it is that makes this school so unique.

A 15-20 minute drive from the rush and hubbub of university activity at POPU – making it one of the two district sites farthest from the university – the area surrounding Jefferson is easily distinguished as providing the “most rural” sectors of Roosevelt Area School District’s rural-suburban landscape. Beyond its relative proximity to a small-town gasoline station, there is very little in terms of commercial activity of any kind within easy walking distance of the school. On foot, people nearest are more apt to be going to the local park or visiting with neighbors.

What the local Jefferson vicinity may lack in terms of industry, it certainly makes up for in its shared history and close-knit sense of community. Some would say that the people who live near Jefferson do so for one of two reasons: their families (often extended as well as immediate) have been there for generations and/or they made a conscious effort to live outside of the
university town (and in a different fashion). One of the questions a veteran teacher at Jefferson might ask his/her students on the first day of school would be, “How many of you are related to someone else in this class?” Typically one- to two-thirds of the class would raise their hands and point to a cousin of one kind or another. S/he might then go on to tell the students what s/he already knew about them --- e.g., “I know your grandmother; she lives down the street from me.” or “Your dad was my student here years ago; he used to sit in that chair over there.” and “Please tell your aunt and uncle that the tractor they sold me was a big help this past summer.” More a generational school perhaps than any other in the district, years ago housing secondary students as well, Jefferson Elementary historically served as a de facto community center for the area. But this seems less true than it once was. For a time, much of the Jefferson community was comprised of affluent farming families. Nowadays, this is less the case as pockets of small developments have sprung up in recent years, providing new places for people to gather.

Jefferson Elementary is arguably RASD’s least diverse school in terms of the range of racial/ethnic identities among the students and their families. This “lily white” profile accurately describes the faculty and staff there as well, but this much is true of most any school site throughout the district. As compared with the district average for elementary schools in RASD, where approximately 87% of all students identify as white/Caucasian, upwards of 93% of the children at Jefferson match this profile and it is the only school in the district with no African American nor American Indian/Native American population to speak of at present. The presence of any children of color – currently, with just over 3% of students identifying as Hispanic and slightly more than that of East Asian decent (see Figure 4-3) – reflects a growth in diversity as compared to just a few years earlier. A veteran teacher at Jefferson reported that only two or three black families have enrolled their students at Jefferson in the last dozen years; one of them – the father having come to work at the university – opting to move nearer Kennedy Elementary by the end of their first year, as the mother was uncomfortable with her children being surrounded by all
these farm kids. Teachers there report feeling a great deal of trust and respect throughout the community in years past; however, they also note an apparent shift in this regard where recent parents/guardians are more inclined to challenge the teachers (e.g., asking for increased levels of homework or for their children to move into “advanced” classes). This kind of parental involvement and advocacy has been common throughout the district for years now, though only recently at Jefferson. On par with the district average, just over 14% of the participating families
at Jefferson are identified as economically disadvantaged (see Appendix G). In short, Jefferson fits the district profile in some senses, but still certainly stands out in others.

In terms of the building itself, Jefferson Elementary is one of the oldest buildings in the district; full of charm and nostalgia, Jefferson is notorious throughout the district for its history of pervasive heat and humidity issues. The heating system is said to be so old that it is increasingly difficult to get replacement parts when problems arise. A second boiler has been added to help, though students may still be found from time to time wearing their coats indoors on especially chilly days. Air conditioning has proven to be even less an option here than at Kennedy, because when someone plugged in a window unit in the office one day years ago, the electricity went out in half the building. Here, too, ceiling fans mounted in most every classroom help to make hot days more bearable.

If necessity is the mother of invention, it is perhaps the father of community as well. The faculty at Jefferson Elementary provide one another a very warm, friendly, open, and relaxed work climate – this too, even a visitor to the building can immediately feel. Although there has been considerable turnover among newly hired employees there, much of the “old guard” at Jefferson reports that there is nowhere they would rather be. A number of the teachers at Jefferson are among the most well respected in the district as well\textsuperscript{63}, so they clearly find creative and effective ways to maintain student interest when the weather and heating/cooling system are not on their side.

In addition to recognizing Jefferson, the building, as unique, Miss Fern Taylor, the teacher-participant in my second case, is worthy of comment as well. I have known Fern for approximately three years, but how I have come to know her has changed considerably. I met Fern initially during her senior year at POPU as one of the students in an elementary social

\textsuperscript{63} In fact, perhaps more teachers from Jefferson (past and present) than any other (with Kennedy as a close second), have been granted the opportunity to take leave of their classrooms for multi-year rotations as instructors and supervisors of the PDS student teachers.
studies course I taught and as a PDS intern student teaching at Kennedy Elementary, where I supervised. Over the course of the yearlong internship I saw a great deal of growth and maturity in Fern both as a student and as a teacher. True to form, her internship within the POPU-RASD PDS made for a notoriously demanding and exhausting year; however, Fern stood out as one of the few student teaching interns who never seemed entirely overwhelmed. Instead, she revealed herself to be an especially organized multi-tasker whose positive demeanor, diligent work ethic, and time management/organizational skills found her valued by her classmates and intermediate division colleagues at Kennedy Elementary, among them Rachel Perkins. I was thrilled for Fern to receive a contract offer to teach third grade at Jefferson Elementary the following autumn. To be sure, given the few open teaching positions in RASD and the huge number of applications they receive, even getting an interview is impressive. To receive a contract offer is indeed an awesome achievement.

As a point of clarification, and indeed I mentioned this in a letter of reference I wrote on her behalf, I think of Fern as a colleague, no longer as one of my students. I have remained in touch with her, sending emails or dropping in on her classroom from time to time as schedules allow. When she volunteered to be one of the participants in my study – the youngest to offer and with the fewest years of formal teaching experience to her credit – I did not assume that she would necessarily be any less capable or skilled at conducting effective read-aloud lessons than any other potential participant. I make this distinction because some might assume more seasoned teachers to be inherently more polished or accomplished as teacher-facilitators. My supervision experience has taught me otherwise – that there are any number of factors that shape one’s effectiveness as a teacher.

My only concern with regard to Fern’s participation in my study was actually how she might perceive me, and my presence in the room. Given the nature of our relationship as having begun with certain power dynamics in place – casting me as an experienced teacher, in a position
to supervise, assess, and evaluate her work and progress as a preservice teacher – I hoped she too would be able to see us as colleagues. By this I mean that I did not wish for her to perform any differently with these lessons than she might if I had not been there at all. There was no need for her to worry about impressing me or needing to be/appear more polished than usual.

Always positive and extremely considerate, I found Fern to be especially accommodating when it came time to consider when we might schedule the read-aloud observations in her class. I wondered, for instance, if she might have been particularly flexible in working with me (even subconsciously) in gratitude for serving as one of her references. With this in mind, I mentioned to her that I would understand if she wished to guard her time more so than she yet had with/from me – that any teacher was sure to be very busy (particularly in the first few months of school) and that I recognized her participation in this study was in addition to an already full plate. Instead Fern assured me that I was not putting her out – that she had a number of fixed time intervals blocked out already each week where read-alouds could and often did regularly fall. Provided we adhered to just those times, conducting the read-alouds should pose no trouble at all.

Entering Fern’s classroom for my first day of data collection, I was grateful to arrive just minutes before the students came back from specials. This allowed me a cushion of time to set up the camera and extension microphone before the children even saw me. The fact that Fern’s room allowed for a large, wooden bookshelf at the back of the carpet – making the space a bit more cozy and defined than most – to some degree cloaked me in some much appreciated invisibility. By this I mean that both the tripod and I would largely be out of view from the vantage point of

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64 Of note, each teacher-participant in my study proved to be more than accommodating of my data collection efforts, offering early on to do anything I might ask of them if I thought it would prove helpful to the study. As such, prior to any data collection began, I made a concerted effort to remind each teacher that if I had my druthers, she would not behave any differently for the purposes of my study than she might otherwise. Clarifying the goal of my research as coming to a better understanding of how these discussions naturally occur, not to stir the pot in one particular direction or another myself.
the students, once they gathered on the carpet and were seated. The tripod allowed for just the camera itself to stick out above the barricade.

As I heard the students walking down the hallway, it seemed they were returning from specials with great enthusiasm; however, once they entered the classroom, they clearly knew the routine: each efficiently finding an appropriate plot of carpet, spaced neatly apart and arranged as an audience for the read-aloud. Fern complimented her students on their smooth transition to prepare for the read-aloud and then introduced me (and my equipment) to the class, reminding students to just behave as though I was not there. While one might imagine that introducing me rendered me anything but invisible, I contend that having my presence and intentions explained made me far less an oddity or mystery in the room.

Returning to my observations of how the children were situated about the carpet for read-aloud (see Figure 4-4), I remember taking note of the students’ orderly arrangement in loosely suggested rows, wondering whether these might have been their assigned seats. Although Fern confirmed for me afterward that they were not assigned seats, she noted that her students do regularly choose similar positions about the rug each day for read-alouds. I noticed the rows farthest upstage (or, closest to the teacher and text) were almost entirely filled with girls. The rows furthest down stage (nearest the bookshelf and furthest from Fern), in turn, were typically comprised of boys. Here again, it seemed the girls were sitting nearest the teacher and were noticeably more congested in their arrangement – though with no observable signs of discomfort or unease at this – than the boys, who spread out a bit, the further they were from the teacher and text.

Moreover, my personal goal was to become a fly-on-the-wall observing the way she would help facilitate them, not necessarily how I would. Furthermore, I clarified that my intentions were with regard primarily to eavesdropping on these discussions, neither judging the teacher nor the students. For the purpose of authenticity in this regard, I asked that even they, the teachers, try to ignore me, so much as was possible; in the ideal scenario, their students would follow suit in this regard.
In one of Fern’s Reflections she wrote:

...I also have noticed with all of the read-alouds that the students who sit in the back often participate less than the students who sit in the front or middle.

Based upon my observations regarding who sits where, this has gendered implications.

There were two noteworthy exceptions to my seating rule of gendered thumb: Mac and Lia. With each read-aloud lesson, Mac consistently situated himself in the row nearest Fern and the book, with not another boy in sight. When I first took note of this anomaly I remember journaling about it, referring to him (and not yet having caught or recalled his name) as “the island of boy in a sea of girls.” Were this metaphor to hold, Lia often proved to be “a peninsula of
girl jetting out into the boy sea,“ as she would usually sit one row behind the nearest set of girls, but typically further downstage with the first row of boys about her. In time, I came to interpret Mac’s decision to sit up front as stemming largely from his desire to see the pictures. He would often turn from side to side to remark to a neighbor, only to realize they were girls and that all the other boys were several rows behind him. Lia, by contrast, seemed to make her decision based upon comfort. Wearing football jerseys most days and larger in stature than most of her female classmates, how Lia sat was more akin to many of the boys – preferring to spread out a bit. She also seemed equally at ease with the boys or girls beside her whenever she found time or reason to touch base with a neighbor. It seemed she attended as much to the class discussion as the book itself, so perhaps this position allowed her to hear more whereas Mac’s position allowed him to see more.

Any misbehavior I observed Fern addressing – e.g., waiting for the students to quiet themselves before she continued, reminding students of her expectations for them, and/or redirecting students to sit elsewhere, as needed – seemed to fall fairly equally across the group. The only noteworthy exception was that she needed to remind several of the students farthest from her and most spread out about the carpet, all of them boys, to please sit up so they could better see the text and she could better see them. In this classroom, there were only two children of color, one boy and one girl of East Asian decent. These students were always present for each lesson in its entirety; in fact, it was rare for a student to miss any part of these lessons in Fern’s room. The only incident I recall was when a specialist called one girl aside to rehearse a reading phonics skill the two must have been working on; this made for a brief interruption – not more than five minutes – and neither of them left the room for it.

Beyond how I might describe Fern’s class or classroom physically, I also took note of how Fern approached facilitating read-alouds. For Fern, read-alouds tended to run on schedule and at a brisk pace. To me, these never felt rushed, but I noticed she allotted less time for the
lessons themselves, fitting read-alouds in regularly between two, fixed time interval obligations (e.g., just after recess but before students departed for their different math classes). This schedule did not allow for much liberty in terms of tangential explorations or follow-up activities beyond discussion alone. As such, the read-alouds function largely in isolation from other parts of the day, less an invitation for curricular integration than a period of the day unto itself.

By comparison with Rachel, each of Fern’s four read-alouds was, on average, 10-15 minutes shorter. As such, it seems Fern makes efficient use of less time – a skill that, by my estimate, is a higher priority at Jefferson than Kennedy, given that Jefferson students routinely shift to different classrooms for math, etc. – but her focus is also different than Rachel’s. In Fern’s estimation, each read-aloud book is to be enjoyed and discussed, but she does not regularly extend the read-aloud with follow-up activities or projects. She could not afford such open-endings, after all, because read-alouds in her room need to run in a timely manner.

Moreover, I cannot overstate how important it is to appreciate the pair of professionals as separate and unique teachers. As such, it is important to resist the alluring trap of making casual comparisons between the two, in a slippery spiral that spins toward finding one educator as superior to the next. First of all, there are no winners in any competition that pits one teacher against another; philosophically the two are more akin to teammates than opponents. Secondly, and this speaks more directly to the value of research than education per say: to be clear, the two are inherently incomparable, but for the nature of who they are and how they move about the world. Rachel, for instance, has a son who is within a year or two of Fern’s age. Also, whereas Rachel is a veteran teacher with an established reputation in the Kennedy community, Fern is not yet tenured, at this, the beginning of her second year teaching. Not only does job security surely provide Fern’s teaching situation additional structural constraints but so too do her age and

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66 It certainly did for me in the years I taught K-12 prior to my receiving tenure; in fact, I know of no teacher yet who would contest that tenure presents with it an air of greater professional ease and credibility.
novice status provide her a more tenuous standing in the Jefferson community. Just as their schools are different and their students are different, their experiences are different; their perspectives are different; their styles are different; their talents are different; their priorities are different. This is not a study that intends to rank and sort people, but to better understand what is happening discursively among students and with teachers. I preface the remainder of this chapter – where I describe the factor and dynamics surrounding Rachel and Fern’s eight unique read-aloud lessons – with this caveat. The goal of Chapter 4 remains to contextualize and set that stage for what promises to follow in Chapter 5: the heart of my analysis with regard to pedagogical discourses.

Contextualizing the Texts & Readings

Just as it was appropriate to situate the schools, teachers, and classes relative to each case, it too seems valuable to contextualize the texts involved and highlight the read-aloud lessons that corresponded with each. Throughout the remainder of this chapter I briefly summarize each of the read-aloud episodes in light of both the text and lesson(s). In order to do this, I draw upon each of my secondary data sets: paired teacher book rankings, teacher reflections, research log, and

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67 Many K-12 educators (myself among them) would contend that were Fern to become a parent/guardian herself, this too would likely further strengthen (deservedly or otherwise) her footing with students’ parents and guardians.

68 The professional climate of these buildings is significantly different and this inherently influences the manner in which teachers at each building have license to approach their work. Were Rachel to work at Jefferson Elementary, she would surely feel the need to adjust certain aspects of her approach and style so as to account for the higher priority time management holds there, as well as the local values and politics of the local community at Jefferson, where even a senior teacher like Rachel may be see, as yet unproven.

69 Given that I had initially intended to collect data during the Spring of 2008, I had each teacher-participant fill out a book ranking sheet then as well as a second time that Fall – this latter go-round at a new time of year, amid a new unit, and with a new class of students in mind. Honoring only the Fall 2008 book ranking data to determine who would read what, it still seems valuable to juxtapose the two sets of ranking here, so as to see if and/or why individual teachers may have felt differently about the texts in the fall than they had in the spring.
culminating interviews to lend insight and better present my understanding of the larger picture with each read-aloud. Rather than present these texts or lessons in the chronological sequence they occurred as read-alouds in each/either classroom – as there are some overlaps – I present them instead in a series of arranged pairs so as to more deliberately bring these separate cases into dialogue with one another for the reader. As such, I first introduce the pair of open-ended, free-choice selections, followed by the pair of gender-themed selections unique to each case. Last, I fold in the two sets of duets – those gender-themed texts read in both classrooms. As the following pages reveal, this amounts to my presenting each of the case’s four read-alouds in juxtaposed couplets (with each pairing suggesting a shared categorical premise). The order in which I discuss each series does not always follow the linear chronology in which these lessons were conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence of these Texts as Read-Aloud Lessons</th>
<th>Ms. Rachel Perkins’ Third Grade Classroom at Kennedy Elementary</th>
<th>Miss Fern Taylor’s Third Grade Classroom at Jefferson Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Aani and the Tree Huggers (Atkins, 1995)</td>
<td>The Boy of the Three-Year Nap (Snyder, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare (Polacco, 2006)</td>
<td>The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>The Princess Knight (Funke, 2004)</td>
<td>The Princess Knight (Funke, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>The Sissy Duckling (Fierstein, 2002)</td>
<td>Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare (Polacco, 2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational Key:
- Open-ended, free choice selections
- Gender-themed selections unique to each case
- Gender-themed selections shared across cases

Figure 4-5: Organizational Sequencing Chart for the Eight Read-Alouds
Open-ended, free choice selections

<table>
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Organizational Key:
- Open-ended, free choice selections
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Figure 4-6: Highlighting the Open-Ended, Free Choice Selections

‘Aani and the Tree Huggers’ (Atkins, 1995)

Based upon a true event that took place in northern India in the 1970s, Aani and the Tree Huggers is the story of a young girl and her village community of women who boldly take a stand to prevent men from a neighboring city from destroying the forest the villagers have come to know and love. While the village men are away gathering crops in a distant field, strangers from the city storm into the area with axes, chainsaws, and orders to deforest the village community’s beloved trees. Despite the women’s arguments against cutting down any of the trees - explaining to the city dwellers the many values their village ascribes to these trees (e.g., providing food, fuel, kindling, shade, refuge for...
animals,) – the men were undeterred; they were too preoccupied with the foreseeable profit they stood to make off the trees as lumber. In an act of peaceful resistance, Aani cleverly leads the women and girls of the village to save their forest by wrapping their bodies about each tree. The men, frustrated but unwilling to cut down any of the trees while the women hold them, retreat and the villagers rejoice. Thus began Chipko Andolan, or the tree hugger movement.

To provide some insight about how this played out as lesson, several key ideas stand out in my mind – the first among them being that Rachel and one of the boys in her class, Andrew, were dressed in traditional Indian garb to generate interest in the lesson from its very onset. I knew to expect this much as Rachel had commented beside this text on her book ranking sheet 70, “Loved it! Want to wear a sari and talk a little about India...” As a jumping off point, not just to the lesson but also a springboard to their unit on the countries of Asia, wearing clothing native to India definitely opened the floodgates for many questions about Indian clothing and culture. Rachel also drew upon the students’ developing geography skills, having students locate India and its neighboring countries on a map as well as a globe. So engaged, it seemed, was everyone in this discussion that 20 minutes had passed before they had even reached the book itself.

How Rachel managed time throughout this, her first read-aloud lesson in a series of four, is worthy of note. In total, her class dedicated more than one hour to this read-aloud, breaking it into two sections: 40 minutes early one Monday morning before they left for physical education and another 25 minutes directly following lunch and recess that afternoon. Certainly the longest

70 Of note here, Rachel’s free-choice selection, Aani and the Tree Huggers, happened to be one from the initial collection/set of books; ranking this among her top two choices stood out as the other potential participants all placed this text among their bottom two. Although this was not one of the “compatible pairings” of gender-themed texts to help identify her three books from my collection, Rachel asked to use the book anyway as her free-read choice – commenting, I can wear some of my traditional Indian clothing I have with this – it’ll be terrific! Having borrowed this book once from me for a read-aloud before (to use with her previous class that spring), I knew this would not be Rachel’s first time facilitating a read-aloud with this text.
of Rachel’s read-alouds, the two sessions dedicated to the text each had a different focus and feel. The morning session focused especially on Indian culture and how it differed from Western conventions; in relation to the book specifically, the main characters and conflicts of the story were introduced as well. A testament to the high levels of engagement in the morning, one child exclaimed “I can’t wait to see what happens!” as the class lined up to go to specials, midway through the story. The afternoon component focused more upon the environmentalist messages available in the story. In Rachel’s reflection she wrote:

One of the challenges about reading this book was dealing with cultural observations as well as the environmental concerns. They certainly observed lots of things about Indian culture in the book and my goal was for them to learn some things about the culture as well as connect with the tree huggers and their concerns. I think that in the morning we were able to flow back and forth between the two goals. After lunch I chose to focus more on the ecological issue so we could move into whether they [the students too] are tree huggers and how we can be tree huggers for the whole world.

In this regard, the afternoon’s lesson culminated in an impromptu brainstorm with regard to what they could do as a class to show their support as tree huggers themselves. Moving beyond the abstract, students were enthused about tangible projects they wished to develop as a class; Rachel promised to make time for them to see these projects to fruition, drawing upon the many ideas and talents of all the children in her class. She reflected:

I loved that they want to write an anthem and make a flag to go with the idea. As we work on these projects, we can reinforce the idea of a broader view of tree hugging. I had no idea that the read-aloud would stimulate these creative projects. I still want to share the website I found that has some ways to recycle things that are normally thrown away.

Although Rachel certainly had planned activities in mind for the lesson (e.g., dressing in traditional Indian attire, locating a relevant website to introduce sometime afterward), it was clear that she remained open to the children’s ideas as well; the last eight minutes or so of the lesson were especially organic in this regard.

Another reason the afternoon felt so much different than the morning session is due to some issues of behavior management. Immediately prior to the afternoon session I noticed a great
deal of roughhousing as indoor recess came to an end. This unbridled energy seemed to spill into the afternoon’s continuation of the read-aloud. One boy, Malcolm, in particular disrupted the lesson repeatedly, defiantly rejecting each small effort Rachel made to address his lesser misbehaviors until things escalated to a major stand-off between the two. Despite her having offered him several “better choices” to make, Malcolm rejected them all, stopping the lesson in its tracks for no fewer than three minutes. I conceptualize Malcolm’s behavior as a display of his powerful will. Not unlike the way several other boys were spread out to take up more space on the carpet, so too, it seemed Malcolm felt justified (consciously or otherwise) in consuming more than his share of time and focus in the lesson. This made for an awkward experience, clearly not just for Rachel or me (as I could certainly empathize with the teacher’s pedagogical dilemma) but for the other children as well, some of whom begged Malcolm to just stop so the story could continue. Rachel eventually found an opening that allowed her to move on with the lesson, unable initially to recapture the lesson’s former momentum. Near the read-aloud’s conclusion, however, Rachel repositioned herself downstage to a new area of the carpet where she promptly proceeded to set up an easel and pad, scribing ideas for the group as they brainstormed possible follow-up projects. During this activity the class seemed to have regained its full enthusiasm in the lesson.

Another insight I should share is that Rachel and her class clearly assumed a united stance with one group in the story over another. While I anticipated the warring sides to be constructed as the women and the men – as that is how I had read them myself initially – interestingly enough, Rachel’s class more often than not made reference to them discursively in terms of the villagers and the city folk. Amid a brief discussion of why the women of the village could imagine no price worthy of letting the men from the city cut their trees down, one student suggested they simply look elsewhere – to find another forest for their lumber needs. In part of

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71 I could also sympathize with the potential unease of her situation, complicated by the fact that it all was being recorded and witnessed by a colleague.
this noteworthy exchange I noticed subtle clues that the class was clearly identifying with one side over the other.

RACHEL: Okay, yeah. You think they could go to other places. What do other people think about- {asking for clarification} Who- Who could go to other places?
*pat*: {very quietly} They could- them.
RACHEL: The people or the men?
*pat*: The men.
RACHEL: Oh the men. You think they could go other places to get trees instead of here? ...

Here it seems the men from the city are constructed as something other than even people – perhaps as the story’s villains or, to borrow a more gendered expression, its bad guys.

‘The Boy of the Three-Year Nap’ (Snyder, 1995)

Recognized as a Caldecott Honor Book for Allen Say’s stylized illustrations, The Boy of the Three-Year Nap is a traditional Japanese folk story about a poor widow and her irresponsible son, Taro – a young man so lazy that the townspeople presume he might sleep for three years at a stretch were no one to wake him. While his mother slaves away sewing silk kimonos to sell to the rich ladies in town, Taro thinks nothing of eating and sleeping all day; he has no sense of responsibility to help provide for his struggling family. Rather than secure a job, as his mother suggests, trickster Taro dreams of somehow gaining riches without lifting a finger. He sets out on a plan to trick the wealthy merchant who lives next door; disguised as the ujigami (a patron god), he demands the rich man

\footnote{Although I have altered the names of all teachers and students involved in this study, I have tried to do so in a manner that honors the recognizable student personalities of individual children. Unfortunately, for some exchanges I was not able to discern who made a given remark. For each of these incidents I attribute the comment to a nebulous *Pat* or variation of the name. If I knew it to be a boy, but was not certain which boy, I refer to the mystery child as *Patrick*. Likewise, if I know a girl made a given remark I indicate this with the name *Patricia*.}
have his daughter marry Taro. Fearing his daughter will be turned into a clay pot if he were to disobey the ujigami, the merchant relents and begins financing a series of expensive repairs on Taro’s and his mother’s dilapidated house – an effort to make it befitting the lifestyle his daughter had become accustomed to prior to this arranged marriage. Once Taro’s mother realizes what her son’s plans are (as well as what his methods have been), under the guise of collaboration, she embarks on a plan of her own – this one to capitalize upon the benefits of the house repairs and put an end to Taro's laziness once and for all.

Moving beyond the text’s plot – the only story, for that matter, entirely new to me in the study – several distinguishable factors from this lesson stand out in my mind, the first of them pertaining to the nature of the text itself. In her follow-up interview, Fern described the text as a unit book, clarifying it as not only approved for the Asia/Japan unit but “district-issued” as well. This meant it was one of a select set of books the district’s curriculum support workers provide as part of the standard materials that arrive at those schools whose turn it is to teach that given unit. Fern went on to explain that most read-alouds she conducted throughout the year were typically with unit books\textsuperscript{73} like this, highlighting the positives (e.g., these were generally strong stories, convenient for pulling in unit-related themes) as well as the negatives (e.g., read back-to-back-to-back throughout a series of days and weeks, the set of books can lead to such adverse reactions as decreased levels of [student and teacher] enthusiasm and student engagement\textsuperscript{74}).

\textsuperscript{73} Although the same could be said of most K-6 classroom teachers throughout RASD (Rachel included), given Fern’s untenured status, an additional reading of this is that to utilize district-approved unit books is akin to staying safely in-bounds (better still, on-base) – a strategic precaution for those teachers looking to avoid friction or drawing any (potentially negative) attention upon themselves.

\textsuperscript{74} In fact, Fern later mentioned feeling she had significantly higher levels of student engagement and discussion with each of the three books that followed – each gender-themed texts from my collection – than she experienced with \textit{The Boy of the Three-Year Nap}. 
As a “district book,” Fern made repeated use of ripe opportunities to highlight unit-related vocabulary words (e.g., cormorant, obi, ujigami) and concepts. She reflected:

During the read-aloud, we focused on and discussed a lot of tricky vocabulary. I hope I got the pronunciation of some of the Japanese words right! I wanted to ask [someone] beforehand, but forgot. If I were to read this book again to the class, I might write a few sentences with the tricky vocabulary words and have students use context clues to figure out the words before reading.

Less specific to the Japan/Asia unit in particular, Fern committed some instructional time to focusing upon the concept of identifying character traits as well and making predictions – each related to grade-level standards with regard to language arts. She explains:

At the beginning of the read-aloud we discussed character traits. I was kind of surprised that not many students heard of character traits before or at least they acted like they hadn’t. I wish I would have talked a little more about this and gave more examples of different kinds of traits to help the students out.

As she asked students to provide character traits they would ascribe to Taro, particularly later in the story, many of her students focused upon reconciling the dyadic relationship between his laziness and cleverness. Predictions, based solely upon the book’s cover, were widespread and varied, but by several pages into the book, the class seemed largely united in their predictions for what Taro’s plan would be, accurately guessing he’d arrange to marry the merchant’s daughter somehow as a means of climbing the social ladder.

When asked who the main character was, the students answered in unison: Taro! As I read the book, I may well have answered both Taro and his mother. Interestingly enough, not only did they seem to identify with Taro primarily, but they also seemed suspicious of his mother.

FERN: ... “YOU START WORK FIRST THING TOMORROW MORNING.” “WORK?!” Taro leaped out of bed, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THAT WAS NOT Part of MY PLAN.” “HAH, DO YOU THINK YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO MAKES PLANS?” HIS MOTHER ANSWERED. What did the mother do? Tracy?

tracy: She knew that he did that, but she made it even worse for him.

75 Though not a unit-related word, she did ask her students to clarify what the word “consent” might mean, as it came up several times in the story. Together they determined it meant to agree to something.
Students seemed to characterize the mother’s actions and motives as inherently more manipulative than Taro’s – perhaps because she is an adult, they side with characters they think of as their peers. However, the notion of females pestering males came up again and again throughout this lesson – not just in relation to the characters of the widow and her son, but with the merchant and his wife as well. There were even some predictions aired before the story began, in reference to the cover and title, that suggest the children may be familiar with the archetypal demanding female representation.

FERN: ...Look at the picture of the boy and the title and what do you think this boy is like? What do you think he’s like? Isaac?
issac: If he had a bigger sister I think she would call him annoying.
FERN: Okay why do you think that?
issac: Because he doesn’t clean up right or do anything.
FERN: Because maybe he doesn’t clean up right or wouldn’t do anything. ... Brenda, what do you think?
brenda: She calls him lazy bones.
FERN: Cause he’s lazy. Why would you think he’s lazy?
brenda: Cause he just sleeps...
FERN: Ellen, what do you think?
ellen: He acts like a three year old.
FERN: Okay why do you think he might act like a three year old?
ellen: Because he’s young and maybe he won’t, like do the- the things that his mother and everybody else is telling him. He was like saying, [sighs then pretends to whine] “Huh, I don’t want to do that! I’m hungry!
RACHEL: Okay.

When they discuss whether or not Taro would make a good friend, the reaction is split, so it would seem he does not get off scot-free with the children – just that they seem to prefer and/or identify with him over his mother.

So far as I could tell, the lesson ran smoothly and called for very little additional time or behavior management adjustments. However, although Fern acknowledged that some students seemed especially “on the ball” with this lesson in terms of participation, she did not feel the lesson went as well as she had hoped it would. She writes:

I also felt like it got kind of long for the students, because they were sitting on the carpet for 40 minutes. Most students can handle this, but there were a few who were getting
restless and kept fidgeting towards the end; therefore, I tried to speed up the conversation at the end, which I don’t like to do. If I were to do this read-aloud again, I would do an after activity with it, something that deals with character traits, perhaps a character report card. I think that this would have helped the students really understand this concept.

She also acknowledged some initial hesitation with the video camera this day, and feeling flustered with regard to pronouncing some of the Japanese terms improperly. According to Fern, in an informal conversation that followed her formal interview, the first lesson allowed her the chance to work out the kinds of kinks brought on by nervous energy, but she was glad to be/feel herself again from the second read-aloud forward.

Gender-themed selections unique to each case

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**Organizational Key:**
- Open-ended, free choice selections
- Gender-themed selections unique to each case
- Gender-themed selections shared across cases

Figure 4-7: Highlighting the Gender-Themed Selections Unique to Each Case
‘The Sissy Duckling’ (Fierstein, 2002)

Fierstein’s *The Sissy Duckling* follows Elmer, a cheerful and sensitive boy duckling whose interests (e.g., baking cakes, decorating cookies, staging puppet shows, painting pictures, cheerleading), style (e.g., heart-shaped pink sunglasses, a pink backpack with daisies adorned, a floral apron), and colorful personality seem to give most everyone pause – everyone, that is, except him (initially) and, of course his Mama. Ridiculed, bullied, and branded a “sissy” before he even can appreciate the word’s meaning, Elmer becomes confused – unsure what he has done wrong or why others react to him in such angry ways. Mama assures him that the word is an unkind term others may use if they don’t understand what makes him so special and unique. Elmer is heartbroken when he overhears his Papa complaining that his son embarrasses him – claiming even to have disowned Elmer. Not wanting to bring any further shame to his family or make others uncomfortable, Elmer runs away, setting off into the dark and mysterious woods to make it on his own. When his parents’ flock leaves to fly south for the winter, Papa gets shot by hunters; fortunately, Elmer comes to his rescue, carrying Papa back to the home he has made for himself in the forest and tending to Papa’s injuries and every need. Still not well enough to fly, Papa is impressed by all that Elmer can do and the two survive the brutal winter together, closer for the experience. When the flock returns in the spring, they are surprised to find either Elmer or Papa alive; after all, no ducks had ever survived a winter like that before. Welcomed back into the fold of their flock, the other ducks have a newfound respect for Elmer, as does his Papa.

The moment I walked into Rachel’s classroom for this, what promised to be her last of the four read-alouds I would record with her class, I noticed a number of differences. Then 1:55 PM with less than 45 minutes remaining before students would begin boarding busses to head
home, nearly half the class was nowhere to be found. Of the students who were present, all twelve were already seated at the back of the room on the carpet, wrapping up a discussion in regard to the Grand Canyon. Typically, when I arrive for these lessons, Rachel’s students were all still at their desks, having not yet transitioned to the carpet for that day’s read-aloud. Seeing them there already made me feel initially as though I was running late (to set up my recording equipment), although I knew this was not the case. How they were arranged about the carpet was unusual to me as well, albeit not entirely unlike anything I had seen yet in this room. [Just the week earlier, for Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare, something fairly similar occurred; I had initially attributed that diagonal arrangement to Rachel having called the students back to the carpet in a new way, asking each child to find a partner along the way and find somewhere to sit beside him or her on the carpet. I wrongly assumed these pairings accounted for the askew arrangement that day, and why Rachel chose to perform the read-aloud from a different place and location.]

Rachel was seated upstage left, facing downstage right (instead of upstage [center] angled directly downstage). Four girls were all gathered nearest her while eight boys fanned out behind them, loosely spread across the remainder of the carpet. As others rejoined the class, each time adding to the numbers on the carpet (and this happened at several points throughout the lesson), they typically hovered around downstage left, -center, or -right, presumably not wishing to disturb the lesson (with some exceptions\textsuperscript{76}). Also of note, no students were seated in the teahouse structure (all construction having been completed only days earlier), as Rachel’s new position (with her back partly to the building) would make for obstructed sightlines should anyone have been in the “house” that day. I suspected its being Election Day may have made for a flurry of building-wide activities. Certainly it felt that way by the day’s end, when the intercom announcements,

\textsuperscript{76} When Malcolm joined the lesson he entered the classroom boldly skipping to the carpet and collapsing dramatically with a crashing sound when he found where he planned to sit. A united front, the rest of the class did their best to ignore this intrusion.
clarifying which presidential candidates had won Kennedy’s school wide election, started
flooding in overtop of Rachel’s final few minutes of instruction.

Beyond these situational details of difference, I noticed a common theme between this
lesson and one I had seen only weeks earlier in Fern’s room: character traits played a significant
role in each lesson’s focus. Rachel explains:

We talked about words like brave, loyal, and what it meant to have ingenuity. Since we
have been analyzing unit books to look for character traits, the students were able to look
for traits and find events in the story to support the traits. Drawing upon a running list of character traits the class had established and grown over the
previous weeks, discussions toward this end added to their running list exercise – more
specifically with two questions that would drive the lesson:

1) *What do you think it means to be a sissy*? and
2) *Can you imagine scenarios where being called a sissy may not be such a bad thing?*

In this regard, *The Sissy Duckling* narrative served as a vehicle for these ongoing discussions.

In addition to focusing on the word sissy as a character trait, smaller, albeit related discussions
surfaced throughout the lesson with regard to what it means to be different, normal, or brave as
well as the distinction between changing who you are and changing one’s opinion.

Speaking of changed opinions, between Rachel’s book rankings, her reflection for this
lesson, and her follow-up interview, it is clear that the mixed feelings she initially had about *The
Sissy Duckling* gave way to greater clarity in what she thought of the book and how she
constructed/conducted discussions around it. She reflects:

I wasn’t sure that I really liked this book; my first impression was that it was not as interesting as some of the other books. However, I found that after reading it I felt like it was an *important* book to share with my students....

After thinking about the book further, I realize that the book was written to help students understand the idea of gender differences which I think we addressed in general but also

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77 Of note, in each classroom, character traits were presented and discussed with the essentialist presumption of these being stable entities. Neither teacher challenged her students to also conceptualize and/or (re)consider character traits in reference to serving as potentially fluid identities.
to help students be comfortable or at least try to see someone who is gay from a different lens. I choose not to specifically bring up the idea of what it means to be gay.

I wonder if I should have sought a way to introduce the idea.

Is this a good age to begin to talk students about sexual preferences? Would their families be upset by the discussion?...

[In Chapter 6 I explore the dissonant relationship I associate with struggles of this kind – between what we think, feel, or believe and what we choose to say and not say.]

‘The Paper Bag Princess’ (Munsch, 1980)

Often touted as perhaps the first feminist fairytale, The Paper Bag Princess tells the story of Princess Elizabeth as she goes to great lengths to rescue her betrothed, Prince Ronald. Not only had a dragon smashed her castle and prince-napped her fiancé, but the dragon’s fiery breath even burned up all her clothes as well—including the ones she was wearing at the time! Ashen and covered in nothing but soot, she found only a paper bag to wear as she gave chase to the dragon, following it back to its cave where the abducted Prince Ronald lay trapped inside. Cleverly, Elizabeth devises a scheme to prey upon the mighty beast’s lesser-known weaknesses: namely, boastfulness and having underestimated her. With wit, charm, and flattery as her only weapons, she tricks the dragon into exhausting itself, putting on a ridiculous display of his great speed (flying around the planet twice in no more than 30 seconds) and the awesome power of his fire breathing capabilities (scorching some fifty forests with his powerful blaze). All this wore the dragon out; once his intense fatigue gave way to a hearty nap, Elizabeth walked into the cave and freed Ronald. Rather than responding with gratitude or admiration for Elizabeth’s resourceful rescue, Ronald rudely rejects Elizabeth, dismissing her from his sight until she is dressed like a proper princess. Offended by his shallow ingratitude
Elizabeth calls off the wedding and marches off triumphantly into the sunset in pursuit of her own happily ever after.

Fern’s *The Paper Bag Princess* read-aloud, only the second sequentially of the four in her room, was nearly identical structurally to its predecessor (*The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*) as well as those two remaining lessons that would follow it. In addition to the seating arrangements being nearly indistinguishable from what I had seen previously with these students, the students again filed into them efficiently, entering the room upon their return from specials. Perhaps because Fern’s read-alouds are consistently slated between one fixed activity and the next, her read-aloud routine allows little time for marked changes or variations. Taking into consideration her previous reflection, in which Fern expresses regret for having left the students sitting still for approximately 40 minutes, she seemed determined to keep this lesson moving at a brisk (though never rushed) pace.

Dedicating a full 20 minutes to this read-aloud, Fern stayed pretty close to the text with her facilitation of *The Paper Bag Princess* as a read-aloud. Although her book rankings reveal she initially considered the possibility of making connections between the dragon in the story with the role dragons play in Japanese art and folklore, Fern opted not to explore this connection; instead, she clung to the text’s genre, characters, and unique narrative to guide much of the discussion: *When you think of a princess, what comes to mind? What do you make of Prince Ronald?* and *Do you think Elizabeth will change into something different and go back to Ronald? Should she? Why or Why not?* In her follow up interview, Fern confided her delight in the opportunity to read books that were not directly associated with the unit she had been teaching –

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78 *The Paper Bag Princess* was the shortest book read in either classroom, having fewer pages and averaging fewer words on each page.

79 Of note, Rachel ranked *The paper Bag Princess* last, though not because she does not like. She commented instead that she had *already* read it to her class the school year; she noted that she always finds some point in the year to read this text with her students.
that they could give the class a break from the norm as just stories for story’s sake. She also remarked that she thought the students responded favorably as well to the change of pace with regard to topic.

One of Fern’s students, Ellen, was especially excited for this reading to come, grinning ear-to-ear as soon as Fern showed its cover. Noticing this, Fern asked if she had read it before; Ellen said she had but promised not to give it away to the others. At this, Fern surveyed the rest of the class to see who, if any, of the other students may have already read the book (or previously had it read to them). The students’ responses indicated that approximately half of them were already familiar with the story. Several pages into the book, Fern asks for predictions:

FERN: Is it true said Elizabeth that you can burn up 10 forests with your fiery breath? Oh yes said the dragon. And he took a huge, deep breath and breathed out so much fire that he burned up 50 forests. Why do you think she asked him that? {calling upon the first person whose hand she sees in the air} Ellen?

ellen: Because she wants to trick him and because she wants him to get tired and then so she can go in the castle and find Ronald and like find her way home again.

FERN: {thwarted by her mistake, wishing she hadn’t asked Ellen} Okay. {encouraging others to make alternative predictions, before this sinks in} Any other guesses? Any other guesses?

jake: Wait. I thought Ellen said she already read the book. {The class groans in frustration, though seemingly not mad at Ellen for her earnest enthusiasm.}

FERN: Any other guesses? Maybe she’s not- Maybe that's not what happens. Any other guesses? ...

{The only guesses that follow match Ellen’s closely, trusting her “prediction” as a retelling of the story as she already knows it to play out.}

With 20/20 hindsight, Fern reflected upon this:

When reading the story, I had asked students to make a prediction about what Elizabeth was doing to the dragon. The first student that I called on pretty much gave the entire ending away as to what the princess was doing. Had I remembered that she raised her hand when I asked who read the story, I would not have called on her.
This situation reminds us of one of the important tensions a classroom teacher faces regularly with read-alouds — struggling to differentiate the questions s/he ask of students knowing that some are already familiar with a given story while others are not. To be sure, keeping track of these details is not easy for any teacher to juggle while facilitating a read-aloud; as such, students hold some level of power and responsibility in this situation as well, recognizing which teacher questions are intended to be “off limits” to them (e.g., questions that call for students to make predictions) and which are not (e.g., content knowledge questions and those that call for students to empathize with different characters’ thoughts or feelings).

According to Fern, something no one could have predicted occurred later that day. Several hours after the read-aloud, one of the students put a paper bag on her head and called for the attention of her classmates, exclaiming, “Look, I’m the paper bag princess.” Several of the students had a good laugh at this and, according to Fern, their comments suggested that many students especially enjoyed that book, esteeming Princess Elizabeth as a role model for them (not just in jest) for her cleverness and strong sense of self.

Beyond the fact that The Paper Bag Princess served perhaps as respite for Fern and her students from the unit on Japan/Asia, it seemed to me that they related with this story in a markedly different manner than what I had observed with The Boy of the Three-Year Nap. My sense was that the traditional Japanese tale engaged the students and teacher as cultural observers – Westerners intrigued perhaps with the East’s customs and general otherworldliness – whereas the narrative of The Paper Bag Princess (situated as it is within the more familiar constructs of conventional Western fairytale80) drew the students to relate and respond to the characters and stories with greater immediacy and emotion. Fern initially broke the fourth wall between the text and her students, pedagogically urging them to imagine Taro as a prospective friend in their world and lives. By contrast, despite her ‘once upon a time’ setting, the students seemed to

80 albeit with the twist of an unconventional ending.
associate Princess Elizabeth with already being an extension of their contemporary world – no wall to be broken81.

With students relating to these characters more personally than they had with those in The Boy of the Three-Year Nap – notably, all seeming to identify with Princess Elizabeth, in total agreement with her assessment of Ronald as a “bum” (Munsch, 1980, p. 23) – perhaps it is no surprise to see so many of their hands rise and fall throughout this read-aloud hoping to pose and answer questions or weigh in with their own commentary of events. Perhaps in response to this heightened level of engagement, I noticed Fern employing a pedagogical approach I had not witnessed her using earlier. At several points throughout the reading she would pause to survey the class as a whole, asking for a thumbs up or down in regard to certain questions as a means of taking the classes temperature before calling on individual students. This was a way to essentially let all students “answer” a given question, without needing to allot the time for each to elaborate verbally. Not only did this kindle their engagement, but it also allowed students to build camaraderie in the sense of finding out which of their classmates shared their opinion. This simple strategy also afforded Fern the opportunity to more strategically consider whom she would call upon next throughout the discussion; not having enough time for every student to always weigh in, she could more readily call upon those students with predictably contrasting points of view that stand to enrich the class conversation with their perspectives.

81 Several children, for instance, made reference to their fond memories of Disney princesses, admitting they bring these points of reference with them to new stories about princesses. Still another girl described how a princess dressed as being similar to “what a girl would wear to a prom,” here again a child bridging the worlds of familiar with fantasy independently.
Gender-themed selections shared across cases

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**Organizational Key:**
- Open-ended, free choice selections
- Gender-themed selections unique to each case
- Gender-themed selections shared across cases

Figure 4-8: Highlighting the Gender-Themed Selections Shared Across Cases

*The Princess Knight* (Funke, 2004)

An instant classic by many estimates, Cornelia Funke’s *The Princess Knight* is an inspiring tale of female empowerment. When his wife, the queen, dies in labor, King Wilfred names the baby after her, Princess Violetta. Not knowing otherwise, he decides to raise her just as he has her three older brothers – preparing them all for knighthood.

Unfortunately, albeit much to the delight of her male siblings, knightly skills and training do not come easily to Violetta initially. Given her diminutive frame and comparative physical weakness, Violetta fell prey to her brothers’ unrelenting mockery. Determined to silence their teasing and to prove to herself that she can indeed become a knight, the
princess decides to steal away each evening and train in secret. With perseverance and
time, Violetta comes to realize that what she lacks in power and size, she might make up
for in dexterity and speed. Unaware of how or why she progressed so speedily to become
a match for them or any other knight they know, her brothers abandon their prior efforts
to taunt or tease her. Just when it seems she has earned the respect of her family, her
father announces a jousting tournament in “honour” of Violetta’s sixteenth birthday,
promising her hand in marriage as the victor’s prize. Outraged and appalled at her
father’s presumptuous gesture, Violetta decides to take matters into her own hands,
competing in the tournament herself, albeit in disguise and under the pseudonym “Sir No-
Name.” Sir No-Name goes on to win the tournament, defeating each of his competitors
convincingly. When it is time for the tournament victor to claim his prize, the king and
crowd are dumbstruck to learn it was Violetta all along. As it were, the prize Violetta
wins is that of her own independence – the right to name a spouse of her own choosing, if
and when she ever decides to marry.

To introduce The Princess Knight in each class, both Fern and Rachel began by drawing
connections between Funke’s book and the text they had each read only a week earlier as part of
this study. This made for the first reference across texts up to that point in either class; however,
each teacher drew upon a different book and made markedly contrasting connections. Still with
princesses in mind after finishing The Paper Bag Princess, Fern’s class discussed whether or not
Princess Elizabeth matched the image they had in mind for a “typical” princess; they also went on
to make predictions about whether or not The Princess Knight was likely to be about a “typical”
princess. By contrast, Rachel’s class referenced their recent reading of Rotten Richie and the
Ultimate Dare, revisiting their discussion of presumably boy- and girl-appropriate activities.
Using this as a jumping-off point, Rachel introduced the term “stereotypes,” first defining the term in relation to Polacco’s book, then introducing the stereotype that “girls can’t be knights” as one *The Princess Knight* was sure to challenge. Rachel reflects upon how she approached this read-aloud:

I made a decision to be more focused about this read-aloud. After hearing the students react to the last book [*Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare*] from their own perspectives, I felt that I wanted to ask them to begin to look at the multiple perspectives from which issues can be viewed. I introduced the word – stereotype- and chose a statement that reflected stereotypes that came from the plot of the book – “Girls can’t be knights.” I asked them to think about what different characters in the book would have to say about the statement.

Rachel charged her students to remember that statement as they moved throughout the text together. She also challenged her students to keep different characters’ perspectives in mind (e.g., the king’s, the nursemaid’s, Violetta’s, and her brothers’) in light of this stereotype. This much, she revealed, would be the class’s collective responsibility as a follow-up activity to the reading itself. Rachel continues:

... We used a 4 square chart to take notes about the perspectives of the different people. The students were very specific about their claims that the characters’ perspectives changed throughout the book. They talked about them having a more stereotypical idea at the beginning, that girls can’t be knights, and that it changed by the end as a result of experiencing the princess’ success.... They felt that this princess didn’t really buy into the stereotype, working hard to show that she was clearly capable of being a knight. In the end, we rewrote the statement to say that “Some girls can be knights”.... My goal for this lesson also was to find ways for my students to discuss and examine how stereotypical ideas influence our lives and the decisions we make.

Although Fern had not assigned her students a predetermined task as they approached the text and read-aloud, she immediately discovered she had a task of her own to face. Reminded of her misfortune the previous week, where one child had given away a significant portion of the last book, Fern surveyed the room to see which, if any, of the students may have already read *this* book. Fern reflects:

When I asked the students at the beginning of the book how many of them were familiar with the book, I was surprised that all of their hands shot up. I did not realize prior to the read-aloud that Mrs. Carpenter [the school librarian] read the book to everyone in second
grade, and apparently the book had a big impact on them, because they all seemed to remember the events in the story.

Facing the unique challenge of a text that not only some, but all of her students had read (and remembered), Fern was pleased to see the students excited to re-read the text. The questions she asked throughout the text had noticeably less to do with making predictions than they typically had in her class; instead Fern’s prompts primarily challenged students to consider different characters’ thoughts and feelings throughout the narrative.

It seemed as though most of the students were along for the ride - the students happy to revisit/re-experience the tale and Fern all too pleased to share it with them. Late in the book, once Violette had already won the tournament, Fern’s strategy shifted slightly. Thinking perhaps the students might have forgotten one special detail near the end of the text, Fern could not resist but ask the group who Violette might choose as a husband. To this, Joel proudly announced, “It’ll be the gardener’s son!” Victorious, he turned to face his peers with arms folded and a smug grin. His classmates groaned and rolled their eyes – a markedly different reaction than they expressed when something similar happened the week earlier when Ellen’s irrepresible enthusiasm caused her to innocently spill the beans in regard to The Paper Bag Princess. Here it seems the other students would have preferred to sustain their own illusions of not knowing – so that the story would be “new” again to them. Fern too seemed disappointed that Joel had given away the ending – confiding to me aside that she believed he did this on purpose to ruin it. In a rare display of student-to-student interaction, another one of Fern’s students, Lia, noted her disapproval.

FERN: ... AND WHO DID SHE MARRY? WELL IF YOU MUST KNOW MANY YEARS LATER SHE MARRIED THE ROSE GARDENER’S SON AND LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

joel: {the same boy whose “guess” gave away the surprise ending82} Yay, for me!

lia: {directed disapprovingly toward the celebrating boy beside her} Yay for you? Yay for the rose gardener’s son!

82 I refer to this as a “surprise ending” as I have yet to meet a child or adult who has predicted these two would end up together the first time they read this story. I, for one, certainly did not see it coming.
In contrast, Rachel’s class was entirely unfamiliar with *The Princess Knight* prior to its reading that day; this luxury afforded Rachel the pedagogical opportunity to let her students caucus with one another in regard to the text, without any fear of unduly overexposing the plot. Similar to the thumbs up/down survey strategy Fern uses from time to time, Rachel encouraged students to use sign language to weigh in affirmatively or otherwise to several questions. More than this, Rachel made use of “think-pair-share” opportunities. These involve asking students to think independently about a question or in response to a prompt for a minute or so before turning to a partner nearby to bounce ideas off one another. After allowing students several minutes to discuss these ideas in pairs, Rachel would call the group together into a collective conversation, encouraging students to share their more developed (by now) ideas with the class as a whole.

Affording time for such student-to-student interactions, the class was able to establish and develop a number of meaningful connections with one idea building upon the next – associations they may not have reached without think-pair-share.

Along the lines of surfaced meaningful connections, Fern reports having seen evidence of this in her class as well, well after the read-aloud ended:

Today (the day after the read-aloud), during our reading time, I was meeting with one group and we were discussing different vocabulary words from the Japan story that they have been reading. One vocabulary word that we discussed was ‘stunned.’ The students were explaining to me what stunned meant, and then they had to use the word in a sentence. One student said, “The knights were stunned to find out that they got beat by a girl, like in the story *The Princess Knight*.” Another student said “I was stunned to find out that the princess married the rose gardener.” We started talking a little more about the book. I thought that it was pretty neat to hear these students refer to the book that I read the day before.

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83 This collaborative learning strategy is especially effective in terms of priming the class for a highly participatory discussion as students have a chance to develop their ideas first individually, then in pairs, before sharing them with the group. The downside of this technique, as a researcher – particularly one focused on discourse analysis – is that it is nearly impossible to capture what everyone is saying while multiple pairings of partners are discussing their ideas all at once.
It is, of course, exciting to see students make connections across different subjects and curricula; likewise, it is exciting (gratifying even) to hear these read-aloud experiences stick with them.\footnote{I find it fascinating that some of the kinds of sustainable connections that Rachel artfully coaxes her students toward reaching \textit{during} the read-alouds she facilitates find their own way to the surface within Fern’s class as well, albeit differently and often well after the fact.}

Interestingly enough, Fern and Rachel had ranked \textit{The Princess Knight} as their first and second choice respectively, with Fern commenting “\textit{Good ending... Good story – I think my class would have a good conversation with this book,}” and Rachel adding, “\textit{Well written – like the spirit of this book. Liked the way the princess follows her dreams.}” Sequentially third for each teacher, both seemed to think their students shared their enthusiasm, reflecting afterward:

Overall, I felt that more students contributed to the discussion about this book than the previous ones. [Rachel]

and

Throughout the reading, I felt like more students participated in this read-aloud than in the previous read-alouds. [Fern]

Unsure what she might attribute her students’ increased levels of participation to, Fern continues:

... I am not sure if it was because they enjoyed the book before and were excited to read it again or if it was some other factor. We normally do read-alouds after lunch, so perhaps they were used to sitting at the carpet at that time and participating during other read-alouds.

Scheduled for the 20 minutes between lunch and when students would need to leave for their respective math classrooms, this slot afforded the lesson plenty of time by Fern’s estimation.\footnote{When Fern initially met with me to schedule the dates and times for each read aloud in this study, I notice that her calendar allotted some flexibility, with 40-minute intervals in the morning and 20-minute intervals in the afternoon most every day. Although I understood she typically only used one time slot or the other each day, I had not realized her preferred time for read-alouds was the shorter interval in the afternoon. Not making this connection initially, I encouraged us to schedule the two previous read-aloud in the AM instead, thinking, as a researcher, this might allow more time for rich conversations to develop around each text. Seeing this from the perspective of a classroom teacher, knowing her schedule and her students far better than I, Fern understood what I could not: her students respond better to read-alouds during this afternoon time, both in terms of maintaining focus and active participation.}

By contrast, Rachel afforded her classes’ reading of \textit{The Princess Knight} twice the time and scheduled it much earlier in the day (9:00 to 9:40 AM), yet she, too, felt rushed for time.
Although Rachel’s class had indeed completed the literal reading of the text before they needed to break for specials, they had only just begun the follow-up activity she had planned. After dropping her students off at the gymnasium, Rachel pulled me aside to confide:

“You know, there’s just never enough time for these things, no matter how hard I try. But then, I guess there’s NEVER enough time anyway, SO I guess what you captured here is some pretty authentic data. What you have there {pointing to my video equipment} is a 100% honest and accurate picture of what our read-alouds in my class are typically like... {grins} and that’s not a bad thing”

Rachel assured me the class continued this activity upon their return from physical education, allotting an additional 20 minutes (60 in total) to seeing that activity to its completion; she indicated she was thrilled with how that activity went.

After reflecting further upon how she facilitated *The Princess Knight* as a read-aloud, Fern expressed similar regret with regard to not having time enough at the read-aloud’s conclusion for a follow-up activity she had in mind:

At the end of the story, I wished I would have compared *The Paper Bag Princess* to *The Princess Knight*. I think that it would have been neat to write down the similarities and differences between the two girls [Princess Elizabeth and Violetta, respectively], because they seemed to have many of the same character traits.

I believe this regret speaks, in part, to a stark contrast between the two teachers’ scheduling circumstances as well as to how they feel differently empowered to respond to them. Rachel feels free to extend her lessons as she sees fit – adding additional time to continue a discussion she is not convinced had fully played out. In this regard, Rachel is at peace approaching her schedule as something fluid – her plans are a draft or suggestion, with room for further editing and organic reconsideration. Controlling her schedule – sans specials, lunch and recess – affords Rachel the opportunity to creatively overlap one subject with the next.

Fern’s schedule, on the other hand, while affording some degree of flexibility on the front end of things – with separate windows built into the weekly schedule for potential lessons to fit ahead of time – is constructed with hard edges and firm borders. Running long on one read-aloud
lesson has a set of very tangible (and unforgivable) repercussions for her and others on her third-grade team at Jefferson. Most of Fern’s math students (i.e., those from the other homerooms) will have lined up outside her classroom, restless and ready to begin their lesson with her. Her fellow grade-level teachers will also be waiting for students from her room to leave join theirs. Tight and fixed schedules, particularly when bound to those of others, can give teachers the sense that to break such windows would leave the mess and danger of shattered glass upon the floor – of consequence not only to the teacher but to others as well. Add to this the fact that Fern, herself, has to switch gears, turning on her heal to teach a different subject to a different set of children then and there. With circumstances that demand compartmentalization, it is no wonder she is more inclined to put some lessons to bed and move on, even if she attaches some reflective regret to such decisions afterward.

‘Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare’ (Polacco, 2006)

Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare is one of Patricia Polacco’s many autobiographical retellings of her childhood – this one focused upon one of her adventures in sibling rivalry. Apparently it was not enough that Richie, Tricia’s pesky older brother, delighted in her embarrassment, humiliating her at every turn in their new school with his rude and gross behavior; Richie made it personal when he made a mockery of Tricia’s passion: ballet. Pushed too far, she counters by daring Richie (with all the kids at school to witness) to come dance in her upcoming recital if he’s so sure it is easy. The exchange escalates to the point of a triple dog dare with skin-do’s and two-ups. Pressured to not back down to his little sister, especially in front of all of their fellow classmates at school, he agrees on one condition: that Tricia in turn must play one game

86 a companion book to My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother (Polacco, 1999) and others
of ice hockey with his team. With each sibling equally certain that his/her favored activity would be more difficult for the other to learn, it seems little thought was paid to his/her own respective learning curve. Tricia learns the hard way just how brutal ice hockey can be, struggling at times just to stay on her feet. An interesting turn of events late in the game leads to a massive penalty and resultant power play, leaving just one player from each team on the ice. Somehow Tricia manages to stop her opponents’ shot and score the game-winning goal herself in the last seconds of the game. When it is Richie’s turn to fulfill his part of the bargain, he is initially humiliated – both by the costume he needs to wear and for his frequent missteps and mistakes while on the stage. Before Tricia can go on with the featured duet she and classmate Paul LeBlanc had prepared, Richie clumsily falls into Paul, spraining the star dancer’s ankle. In the end, Richie goes on in Paul’s place with Tricia for the finale; to everyone’s surprise he does an excellent job with an especially difficult dance and the two siblings finish the night in triumph. As the story ends we see that Richie and Tricia have a newfound respect for one another as well as their activities of choice.

Given that *Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare* is unquestionably the longest book used in this study (averaging the most words per page and consisting of the most pages), it comes as little surprise that timing proved to be a complicating factor for both teachers. In their approach to conducting this read-aloud (the second in Rachel’s classroom, the fourth in Fern’s) both Rachel and Fern made scheduling decisions that I initially read as uncharacteristic for each of them.

Ranking this book among her top four choices (of the original nine gender-themed texts I provided for each teacher to consider), Fern commented, “The students will enjoy, but rather long ... I like this, may have to do two sessions long.” This proved to be the only lesson Fern scheduled to extend across two of her typical windows of time for read-alouds. Instead of allotting a full
hour to the read-aloud (using both the morning and afternoon windows in their entirety, 40 and 20 minutes respectively), Fern instead arranged to begin the read-aloud just 25 minutes prior to lunch/recess, continuing the lesson directly afterward in the 20 minutes prior to when students would need to shift classrooms for math. This allowed for 45 minutes with a break midway – strategically reflective of Fern’s concerns about having her third-graders sitting still on the carpet for too long of a spell (as she felt they had with *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*). These 45 minutes were also, in a sense, “uninterrupted” in terms of their having not been disrupted by another subject area of the curriculum where the students would need to shift gears and Fern would as well; instead, lunch and recess provided just a respite from formal curricula. Just prior to the lessons’ beginning Fern was wrapping up a grammar worksheet activity with the students at their seats.

As I entered Rachel’s classroom, I took note of the flurried activity all around it, with students spread about the space working on different aspects of the Japanese teahouse project. The room was full of life and energy, still I was somewhat skeptical – surprised that Rachel had planned to finish the entire read-aloud between 9:00 and 9:40AM, before the children went to physical education. [For the sake of comparison, this was the very same time interval she set out to use for *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (a significantly briefer text) only a week earlier and that lesson extended beyond an hour.] Having ranked this book her first choice, Rachel commented, “Patricia Polacco! I love her books and we’ve been reading them as an author study [all this month] – perfect!” Perhaps the fact that both she and her students were already very familiar with books by this author, Rachel felt confident they would move at a particularly brisk pace. The lesson did, however, run over a few minutes (and so the students arrived late to the gymnasium); Rachel reflects:

87 having reportedly used a dozen or more of them earlier, among them being *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother* (Polacco, 1999)
I realize that this may be the type of story, because of the length and the complexity of the issues, that I want to go back with the class and reread sections. Focused rereading would also help with their connection to the feelings of the characters because they were unable to explain why Richie and Trisha changed their minds about each other in the end of the book. I was surprised that this was so hard for them. I realize that it will be helpful in future read-alouds to find ways for them try to identify with the feelings of the characters and how they change. They need more experience/practice with standing in someone else’s shoes. I may try to do some small acting out of the story or role-playing to help with this.

I remember noting that this read-aloud felt a bit rushed, at least compared with her others. Still it was nice to learn what pedagogical adjustments and strategies Rachel planned to use to make up the difference.

With Fern’s class, I noticed two pedagogical adjustments that stood out from anything I had seen in her previous three lessons – the first of which involved employing a student as the resident expert on a topic. Given that the text juxtaposes a considerable amount of jargon related to both ice hockey and ballet, it soon became clear that Fern was more familiar with one than the other. While Fern seemed to know a great deal about *pucks, penalties*, and *power plays* in the world of hockey, she noticeably tripped over some of the French terminology associated with different positions and dance moves in ballet. [I was immediately reminded of Fern’s reflection about *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* and her not having checked with someone for verification on how to pronounce certain terms.] Reaching the end of the first page where this occurred, Fern stopped abruptly to ask whether anyone in the room knew more about ballet than she did. One girl near the front, Kami, graciously re-pronounced a number of the terms for Fern before demonstrating some of these corresponding dance positions and moves for the class. More than appreciative of Kami’s service as the class’s prima ballerina, Fern took notice as well of how this affected Kami’s participation in class that day:

I was impressed by how much Kami participated during the read-aloud, as well as by some of her responses. She is one that I often have to encourage to participate more.
No one could debate, Fern included, that Kami’s expertise helped the rest of the class have a clearer understanding of Polacco’s text; in this regard, it proved to be a particularly potent pedagogical decision for Fern to have made with this lesson.

Another, especially noteworthy and powerful pedagogical choice Fern made with this lesson was to encourage her class to engage in a debate. Noticing early on in the reading that the class seemed to be identifying along gender-lines – the boys overwhelmingly identified with Richie in all his gross and obnoxious boyishness while the girls stood behind Tricia, empathizing with both her embarrassment and her spunk – Fern made a decision to explore this dynamic and see how it might play out. Uncharacteristic of the three read-alouds she facilitated earlier in the study, Fern stepped away from the book itself, posing the question:

FERN: **Do you think ballet or hockey- which one is easier? Or harder? Or do you think they’re the same? What do you think?**

The class quickly erupted in a spirited debate (which, in Chapter 5, I explore discursively in more detail) that seemed to pull every student into the discussion in one way or another as participation levels spiked. As Fern recalls:

> When asking the question what sport they thought was harder, ballet or hockey, it was interesting how all of the girls said that ballet would be harder and all of the boys said that hockey would be harder.

Whereas the lines were clearly drawn, I was impressed to see the students make their cases respectively, but also respectfully. Midway through the story some boys confided they thought ballet was just as difficult as ice hockey, perhaps harder. Before long, other students followed suit, not so much in agreement with these boys specifically, but clinging less certainly to their initial position. Fern reflects:

> ... At the end of the story, when asked if they would change their answer about which sport was harder, a few students did.
Instead of blindly adhering to the presumption of there being only two available answers to Fern’s initial question, by the story’s end many of the students explore the blurry spaces between *either* and *or*. The gendered dynamics of this lesson made for an interesting scene visually as well as discursively, particularly in light of the way students typically arrange themselves for read-alouds in Fern’s room. Mac, sitting upstage as “the island of boy in a sea of girl” near Fern and the text, was noticeably less inclined to bend than many of the boys seated further down stage on the carpet. Fern remarked

Mac said he would not change his response that hockey was harder, because it was more of a contact sport. This did not surprise me, because Mac is a huge sports guy and I have heard him mention before (at the beginning of the school year during a community building activity) that girls could not play sports as well as guys (which, I quickly challenged him and disagreed, and yet he still did not change his mind.)

Speaking of individuals whose perspective stood in stark contrast to all those about him/her, late in the lesson, Rachel found much of her class in disagreement with her interpretation of the book. Having just read the last line of the last page, she asked her students:

**RACHEL:** ... *So some of you predicted that it was going to be a disaster. Was it a disaster?*

**All:** *Yes.*

The students’ answer clearly shocked Rachel as (and she confided this to me much later, in her follow-up interview) her initial inclination was to highlight what a huge success the gendered-swap had been for all involved. Instead, it seem the students recognized the story’s events only in terms of failure. Rachel explains:

From looking at the cover the students made predictions that Richie and Trish would try each other’s activities and it would be a disaster. I was pleased with the predictions because I thought they would find that they had been wrong. Therefore, I was very surprised that at the end of the book they still thought that the role changes had mostly been a disaster. I’ve been thinking about why they remembered all the difficulties that Richie and Trish had while I only seemed to concentrate on the end and the redemption. I find it interesting that it seems the children held on to the total story while I only looked at the end. Realizing this will hopefully inform the types of questions I ask.
Like Fern acknowledged with the debate she led, Rachel found this book to be an especially effective pied piper in terms of its ability to summon interesting discussions of gender to play out:

I felt that this book lent itself to talking about male and female roles. The students were able to talk about this to some extent but they seemed to have limited vocabulary to talk about the issues. I’m thinking that it may be helpful to introduce the word stereotypes before we read the next book and have them look for ways that book reverses stereotypes. I realize that introducing the book with this sets the tone for the discussion but I feel that as a teacher with limited time, I need to make decisions about the direction of the discussion. I want my students to work on their awareness of stereotyping and try to be detectives/advocates for a more equitable world. I’m hoping that the discussion of the next book will afford them the opportunity to increase their awareness of how stereotypes keep people from making choices and learning new things.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Having highlighted each of the cases and texts involved — contextualizing the teacher-participants, their schools, classes, and classrooms, as well as other pedagogical factors relevant to each of the eight lessons — this chapter serves to prepare the reader for Chapter 5, where I more fully discuss and analyze the specific discourses taken up throughout and across the read-alouds themselves.
Chapter 5

Data Presentation and Analysis

Defining Key Terms Related to My Analysis

In working with my primary data set – video footage from across a series of four read-aloud lessons per participating case – I devoted substantial time toward watching each of the episodes repeatedly as well as to experimenting reflectively with initial coding strategies before I arrived at what I felt would serve this study best. Before I begin to elaborate on what those codes are, it seems appropriate to first clarify what I mean by coding. Particularly within Studiocode, coding is a deliberate and systematic process one employs to structure the way s/he approaches, classifies, and considers different aspects of data-sets. Codes provide the researcher a strategic means for plainly identifying, tagging, and sorting instances of pertinent data into meaningful clusters of categorical understanding. One might establish a code for the teacher’s behavior management strategies, how discussions around individual characters play out, what the class seems to find most amusing, or even the teacher’s facial expressions and gestures. While dissecting the same body of data, where and how different researchers choose to make their metaphorical incisions – or research codes – allows them to appreciate what it is they see in markedly different ways. In that sense, the codes a researcher adopts for the purposes of data analysis are indicative of the lenses s/he brings to the data and what aspects of information s/he sees as being most relevant to his/her actual research question.

In the following sections of this chapter I provide operational definitions for each of the five principal codes that have guided my analysis; I also highlight how individual codes relate to
and distinguish themselves from one another before moving on to describe the four distinguishable themes my analysis has revealed.

**Gender personified: Gendered identities (characterized)**

The first of several codes I designed to shed light upon the informal gendered curricula exercised within and across these read-aloud lessons, my “gender personified” code refers specifically to the manner in which certain character archetypes from the stories themselves (e.g., prince, princess, knight, ninja, father, priest, sissy, bully) tend to elicit deeply charged class commentary about how gendered identities are (and ought to be) appropriated. More than merely identifying which character types and/or personae are discussed as such, this code focuses upon how the discussions of/around such characters might predictably serve as a virtual canvas for 1) constructing these figures as abstract representations of gender (perhaps in the discursive foreground) while also 2) conveying broader attitudes and ideas of the classes’ collective subconscious about gender itself (background).  

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88 Imagine if you will an artist who, upon sketching his/her interpretation of the word *mother*, traces the original image’s outline onto a piece of cardstock before cutting out the resultant two-dimensional silhouette. A template in hand, s/he employs the pattern as a guide and proceeds to secure the stencil to a fresh sheet of parchment, before flooding the paper with enthusiastic splatter-painting strokes of every color and variety. Minutes later, the artist peels away the muddied stencil shield to reveal a clean, glowing ghost-image reproduction of the original image, albeit a vastly different representation than its initial manifestation. The intact and untouched depiction serves to personify *mother* by virtue of the negative space – a figure constructed as much by what is presumed *not* to be as by what it is. Metaphorically speaking, the gender personified code functions much in the same way as such an art project – what serves to shape and define a given character profile is a multi-layered process, as much about the construction of gendered dye-cuts as the discursive substances and mediums employed for casting from and/or tweaking the presumed mold itself.
Gender interacted: Gendered relationships (contextualized)

A second code crafted to feature other aspects of the informal gendered curricula taken up and explored throughout these read-alouds, my “gender interacted” code pertains not to the construction of specific character identities or archetypes, but to the ways in which individuals perform intricately gendered roles as they relate to and interact with one another. Less a matter of simply naming those types of relationships as entities unto themselves (e.g., husband/wife, courting couple, parent/child, siblings, peers, friends, private individual/public audience), this code serves as a means of capturing the existing ideas, intentions, and attitudes that discursively surround the way the class imagines one would/could/should live such roles. Contextualized as such, different responsibilities, motivations, and expectations adorn the tree-limbs of how given associations presume to function. Coded as such, the taken-for-granted rapport attached to certain social roles and relationships might be more easily extracted, investigated, and tilled.

Gender regulated: Gendered systems (interpreted)

Still another code reveals itself to further underscore the discursive gendered curricula evidenced in these class discussions – this one perhaps more explicitly so than either prior. By contrast with the two preceding codes, “gender regulated” speaks less directly to the literal scaffolding of characters or their associative dynamics as presented in the literal text, instead directing its attention to the broader system of rules and regulation for gender itself – circumstantial structures of hegemonic interpretation that extend well beyond the scope and context of any written page and into the collective world of the reader. Ascribing socialized conventions of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity as prescriptive lenses in reading/regarding gendered notions of ability, agency, allowance, perspective, activity, and
accessory, etc., the gender regulated code unveils much of the hidden framework that presumes to hold gender – in and of itself – in position, foundational to the way we presume to construct and appreciate, then regulate and interpret the world as indeed gendered.

**Pedagogical strategies of engagement: Relating readers to/with texts**

Moving away from a focus on the curricula of gendering toward the application and practice of read-alouds in action, my “pedagogical strategies of engagement” code serves to showcase the efforts employed to encourage one’s fellow readers to engage with and relate to the published texts. Such methods – and to be clear, teachers and students alike exercised pedagogical strategies toward these ends – typically range from encouraging one another to empathize with different characters or circumstances in the stories, to drawing connections beyond the text to ever-growing fields of experience, exposure, opinion, perspective, curiosity, and understanding. No matter their source, or where such methods might lend themselves or lead, the apparent (to me) intention behind them was as much to invite readers further into the texts as to coax these stories into the hearts, mind, and interests of each reader as well.

**Pedagogical structures of instruction: Classroom teacher-student dynamics**

Concentrated as well upon the pedagogical sphere of read-alouds in practice, my “pedagogical structures of instruction” code highlights the system of arrangements that constitute teacher-student dynamics within the context of these as classroom “lessons.” By this I mean the plethora of distinguishable features and reminders (regarding, e.g., behavior management, metacommentary, a prioritization of focus, and any structural shifts/expectations in the lesson itself) that reinforce the teacher’s position relative to the rest of the class as one of being in the
driver’s seat of the read-aloud (the lesson) as an instructional vehicle. Toward these ends, this code divulges any pretense that the conventions of classroom instruction, even within the context of a read-aloud (lesson), are without corresponding structural relationships to power, authority, and control.

Moving Beyond Initial Codes toward Eventual Themes

Gendering curricula

As the names suggest, each of my first three codes (gender personified, gender interacted, and gender regulated) concern what I conceptualize as the greater curricula of gendering evidenced throughout the discourses of these lessons. In doing so, all three relate to one another in a cumulative, dramatic production – each an important layer of the whole.

Imagine for the moment that one was given the task of staging a production of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. {GENDER PERSONIFIED} The project might begin with casting your principal players and encouraging each to research and explore his/her developing character – how s/he looks, walks, talks, emotes, and thinks, etc. Add to this the overlapping charge to design costumes, amass props, and create scenery, etc. to round out the picture, breathing life into these characters against the backdrop of the world that shapes them. Romeo and Juliet are born, though the latent, star-crossed lovers have yet to meet. {GENDER INTERACTED} Next begins the process of realizing how separate perspectives and objectives coalesce or collide amid the narrative’s scene structure. A rehearsal period affords opportunities to block scenes, run dialogue, choreograph bodies, explore motivations, and experiment with pivotal instances/moments that reveal the organic chemistry, camaraderie, conflict, and/or rapport existing between characters as they relate to one another. We come to imagine the complex
tensions among and between factions of the Montague and Capulet worlds – these, in turn, color the way the young lovers stand to relate to one another. {GENDER REGULATED} Characters developed and context revealed, the broader focus becomes the show itself – what the piece itself has to say and how that relates to a world beyond the footlights or floorboards of any theatre. Deeper themes of love, honor, and innocence surface; constructivist notions of passion, possibility, and justice take center stage, each with a message to share – not just of the story but of all our stories... of every story... of the world at large.

It is in much the same way that these first three codes relate to one another – each a different lens and voice depicting still another angle/perspective of the larger gendered curriculum available and taken up in accord with the texts.

Pedagogies of practice (when facilitating read-alouds)

By contrast, the latter two codes (pedagogical strategies of engagement and pedagogical structures of instruction) situate themselves in juxtaposition to the material, as well as to one another. Less concerned with any company, crew, or craft, the juxtaposed pair of pedagogical codes aims the production toward its inevitable audience. {PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES OF ENGAGEMENT} Maestros of the theatre know to direct as much focus to the house as they do to the stage itself. Taking heed of how an audience stands to react to the performance means considering what might hail their laughter, what may summon their tears, what could coax them to take sides, or tug at their heartstrings and force them to care. Inviting the audience in to invest emotionally in the show is all a part of the experience. {PEDAGOGICAL STRUCTURES OF INSTRUCTION} So too, however, are the producer’s decisions to remind one’s audience of its place in relation to the show – to advertise and welcome patrons to attend, to clarify expectations throughout the performance (cellular phones off, no flash photography, no eating, no side-
discussions), to pause for intermissions, adjust lighting at scene changes, to invite audience participation (on occasion), and to hold for applause.

These two pedagogical codes frame the larger picture of what/how events play out on stage, allowing us a glimpse behind the scenes – explicit access to both the director’s and producer’s handiwork/efforts.

Divining a pedagogy of gendering (from overlaps and intersections)

Having clarified the nature of my five primary codes as well as how each related to one another (and the broader research project), I put them to use via Studiocode software. Before long, I found myself considering the video data with renewed fascination – now able to take into account a variety of research angles, patterns, and possibilities I might have otherwise missed. With a number of potential avenues to consider, I thought it best to revisit my research question so as to ground my focus: *How are discourses of gender pedagogically engaged within and throughout the interactions between and among elementary students and their teacher as they negotiate gender-themed children’s books (and gender itself) during classroom read-aloud sessions?* It seemed to me the strategic next step was to imagine how/where the spheres of curricular gendering and pedagogical practice might distinguishably intersect. Toward these ends, a splinter faction materialized as a byproduct of this overlap – referencing just those data instances that satisfied a set of coupled criteria: triggering one or more of the three curricular gendering codes in addition to one or both of the remaining duo of pedagogical codes (see Appendix G). With this in mind, I turned my focus entirely to this final grouping, trusting that any data events or instances that fulfilled these paired conditions would prove most thematically relevant to addressing my research question.
Discursive Themes of Pedagogical Gendering Emerge

Having both determined and employed the qualifying criteria to glean those data excerpts that pertain most directly to what I am calling “pedagogies of gendering,” I focused my research energies specifically upon this select pool of data; moving beyond the continued construction or application of codes, I hoped to unearth whatever gendered themes might emerge from my analysis of these data. To clarify what I mean precisely by themes (and so as not to confuse these with codes or the like), these are *salient patterns of related discourse that coalesce in a sort of shared conversation with one another around distinct notions of gender*. By shared, I mean to say these themes would extend beyond individual instances of situated dialogue, resurfacing across time(s), texts, contexts, cases, and specific codes. Utilizing Studiocode software to re-organize these series of exchanges into highlight-reel sets representative of conversational collectives allowed me to distinguish which of these budding themes did and did not hold up in terms of strength and relevance to my research question (See Appendix G). More specifically, I hoped to distill just those themes whose presence held an undeniable and inescapable influence on the
read-alouds themselves – effectively steering and shaping (to some degree) the experiences in ways pertinent to this study.

Below, I provide operational definitions for each of the four most noteworthy themes that I have discovered through my data analysis process.

**Binary conventions: Gender interpreted through prescriptive lenses of regulation**

When the fields of photography, film, and television each moved respectively beyond the limitations of black and white alone, doors of latent possibility swung open for how we might experience and appreciate the visual world of such media. By contrast, extant conventions of gender (at least throughout much of the Western world) still cling tightly to old habits/methods of conceiving the world only in tones of binary contrast – albeit fewer shades of grey than a continuum ranging from blue to pink. Learning to speak this, their language of emersion, children and adults alike learn to reproduce and ascribe gendered (often sexed) connotations to most anything in their world. Interestingly enough, the trenches of guy/gal appropriation are typically deeper perhaps for the ways in which they go unspoken\(^89\) (e.g., gendered connotations associated with work and play activities) than they are when such distinctions are made explicit (e.g., sex-specific bathrooms). Toward these ends, students and teachers have much to say in this regard – particularly when prompted by characters and or contexts that noticeably trip a wire or trouble a convention.

To some degree, this first theme – one ascribing binary conventions of gender to account for how things are the way they are – was certainly the most predictable theme for me, both in terms of its presence and prevalence. Long before I collected any data, I anticipated such timeless conversations were likely to ensue – not only had they surfaced in earlier pilot studies I

\(^{89}\) and, as such, unquestioned as well
conducted, but I could not escape them as an elementary student or teacher. As I mentioned, it is perhaps no surprise that binary conventions recur in classroom discussions, yet how such concepts emerged and played out pedagogically throughout the course of this study made for a fascinatingly rich and ongoing dialogic theme throughout the data. Binary conventions thematically steered (if not governed) much of the discussions regarding how members of each class appropriated and interpreted gendered behaviors, possibilities, perspectives, and consequences for coloring in- or even outside the lines of pink and blue certainty.

**Feminized identities: Femininities considered against the backdrop of a masculinist world**

Just as defining that which is female typically stands to function, at least in part, in juxtaposition to that which is considered to be male\(^90\), so too is femininity often understood in relation to masculinity. To some degree, such connections may travel in either direction, but the current clearly favors the recognition of blue before pink. Given the constructs of a pervasive, masculinist society, it is perhaps no surprise that so much of the discussion around even female figures – be they in the media, literature, curricula, community, or family – can tend to serve a largely male-centered and/or heteronormative narrative\(^91\). With so many privileges afforded to patriarchal figures, structures, positions, and benefactors, I find it valuable to take heed of what is happening with femininity. Are doors held open for it? Slammed in its face? A bit of each perhaps?

Interestingly enough, it seemed I was not alone in this curiosity; in fact, as I contemplated the data, it quickly became evident that the discursive dynamics surrounding certain feminized

\(^90\) particularly with languages that, more often than not, subtly presume masculinity until indicated otherwise.

\(^91\) Some would say (Knoepflmacher, 1999; Paul, 1998) the tale of Sleeping Beauty is less about developing or understanding the character of Princess Aurora, than how/why she needs to be rescued and how she serves as the rescuer’s prize.
identities and characters (e.g., princesses and sissies in particular) proved to be especially stimulating in terms of advancing pedagogies of gendering – far more so than their masculinized counterparts (e.g., knights, princes, kings, tomboys, or bullies). To clarify what I mean by feminized identities, these are archetypal figures presumed to gravitate to the very pinkest ends of the masculine/feminine spectrum. This is not to say that princess and sissy characters were necessarily the most popular or favored characters among each class, but that such figures certainly generated the most colorful and remarkable talk about/around gender. Rather than pursuing princess and sissy talk as two independent themes – an idea I initially considered but rejected – I chose to explore how the two might function as integral parts of a larger, more sophisticated conversation about the embodied performance of (and reception toward) different femininities. The fact that princesses and sissies happen to be archetypal constructs that represent such contrasting images – both in terms of sex and status – provides an awesome invitation for multi-layered discourses of pedagogical gendering to surface in particularly intriguing ways.

Designer labels off-the-rack: Dressing up gender in clothing and clothing in gender

Early on, as I was still in the process of collecting video data in each of the participating classrooms, I recognized what I perceived to be a preoccupation with dress. Particularly in terms of responding to different characters or attributing qualities to them, it seemed how they dressed or what accessories they had on-hand were easy points of entry for a number of students (or the teacher) in each class. Not only was there an apparent fascination with clothing and accessories

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92 I resist referring to these as hyper-feminized identities because that seems an over-simplification; each of them, upon closer inspection, proves to complicate and disrupt the heteronormative continuum itself.

93 Of note, many of the available masculinized archetypes featured in the texts and discussions yielded notably fewer questions and warranted less clarification. I wonder, for instance, if such figures’ presence, purpose, and motivations perhaps offered more familiar/less complex perspectives to consider.

94 though I may revisit that decision with future research projects
but I noticed that these discursive episodes routinely beckoned colorful commentary, questions, and remarks about gender. I refer to this theme as “gender off the rack” because it seemed much of the dialogue would support the idea that certain clothing items and/or accessories simply carry ready-made connotations – at times (re)defining the person associated with them (wearing them, holding them, etc.) in deeply gendered ways. If we can be said to wear gender(s) as we go about our lives, perhaps clothing and accessories provide a literal manifestation (though surely not the only) of how we conceptualize, construct, and perform our own gendered identities.

Revisiting the gendered remarks and ideas surrounding dress and accessories proved especially fruitful once I had finished coding my data. Focused specifically upon just those instances that qualified as pedagogies of gendering – and perhaps because clothing represents a physical, albeit alterable manifestation of gender expression made especially available in the illustrations – I was surprised to see just how significant a role clothing seemed to play in how classes interpreted everything as gendered – from characters to cultures, capabilities, cares, and circumstances. My gender off the rack theme sews together the collective trappings of a running commentary taken up and explored amid gendered class discussions of clothing and accessories in each classroom, providing an original collection of revealing discursive ensembles and exchanges readied for the runway.

“Informed outsiders”: Adult relationships as understood through kids’ eyes/ears/mouths

Despite the fact that most third grade students have yet to enter the dating world (much less are they likely to have married or become parents yet), still, a flood of nebulous notions surrounding such relationships litter and adorn our adult-centered societies. Informed as much perhaps by their lived experiences as the literary and pop-culture curricula all around, by third grade, many children are likely to consider themselves rather fluent readers of such mature
relationships, ready to comment and critique as well as project themselves into a future where they might take on/assume such responsibilities. Typically having neither written nor performed any of these roles firsthand, children presume an “informed outsider” perspective that affords them a particularly fascinating lens for other children and adults alike to consider – particularly with regard to how and why they feel such roles ought to be carried out.

My fourth theme emerged from the cumulative collection of running commentary remarks and exchanges that form a broader conversation about what it means to take on and/or perform\(^\text{95}\) such grown-up roles, shedding light upon the sense they (the participating children) make of the institutions, motivations, responsibilities, and inner workings of courtship, marriage, parenting, and the like. As such, the gender-interacted code I had used previously served in large part as a compass in leading me to decipher what facets of the pedagogies of gendering stood to provide an effective skeleton for these informed outsiders’ interactions.

**Elaborating Upon Each of My Four Emergent Themes**

For the remainder of this chapter, I highlight sets of exchanges reminiscent of each theme (via portions of transcripts, etc.), as I elaborate upon how I understand each of the discursive themes to have played out within and across the read-alouds. I also clarify how I see all four of my themes as relating to one another in a collective conversation of pedagogical gendering.

\(^{95}\) or experience – for instance, it’s reasonable to imagine that many of the students conceptualize appropriate parenting skills and responsibilities from their own situated experience of having been parented in the past and present.
Binary conventions in action

Time and again, some of this study’s most fruitful points of entry, at least in terms of getting the gendered discussion ball rolling, have come with respect to whether or not convention regards certain activities, interests, exercises, behaviors, tasks, chores, or jobs as particularly suited for boys or girls – for men or women. Foundational, in fact, to several other, subsequent discursive strands within the broader theme of binary conventions, the impression that people attribute certain gendered connotations to any number of activities or behaviors is very much alive (and thriving) within the language and thinking expressed in these classrooms.

Gendered activities

At the heart of attributing certain activities to a prescribed gender lies the assumption that there are predictable patterns among (though presumably not across) gender lines for how boys and girls respectively prefer to use their bodies, time, energies, and talents. In the following exchange, for instance, Fern coaxes her students to recognize and consider the gendered subtext of what the Emma character (Princess Violetta’s nursemaid) is indeed advising – something I suspect a number of the students may have missed (for its subtlety) were they to have read The Princess Knight independently.

FERN: “...Why not ask your father to stop teaching you all this silly fighting and to let you learn something else instead. Embroidery perhaps. Or weaving. Or playing the flute. Something useful?”

What does she mean by useful? ... Look at the things that the nurse[maid] was telling her [Violetta] to do. Weaving, playing the flute, embroidery. What’s embroidery? Kami?

kami: Making crafts.

FERN: Embroidery- not necessarily, but it's when you are sewing on little parts on your clothes like patches or something - those could be embroidery. What do
all of those things have in common? How are they different from the things that she’s already learning? How are they different? ... Tracy?

tracy: They’re all girl things.

FERN: Yeah, they’re all girl things the nursemaid is telling her to do.

I wonder if there is not an interesting parallel here, between Emma’s assumptions about Violetta and Fern’s of her class. Emma seemingly expects these “girl things” to be more agreeable activities for Violetta – tasks (despite her having never tried them before) the princess will likely take to more intuitively as well as with greater success and enjoyment than she has experienced in her training as a knight (at least, thus far in the story). By comparison, Fern was rather confident – and rightly so, it seems – that her students (at least, collectively) would be conscious of and able to discern the gendered implications certain kinds of activities carry, despite the fact that they had never previously discussed such connotations explicitly as a class. It never ceases to amaze me what we, as adults, presume youth may innately understand – nor in fact, what they do.

Of note, the range of activity options – especially among those that surface in these children’s texts and their related read-aloud discussions – afforded male connotations reads as significantly broader than those ascribed to girls and women. Although this did not come as a particular surprise to me, still, as a researcher, seeing such longstanding inequities of access and opportunity play out in front of my eyes, ears, and camera proved to be rather discouraging.

96 not to mention the fact that one of the activities listed in the text (namely, embroidery) was rather unfamiliar to many of the students

97 These include everything from playing football to ice hockey, baseball, wrestling, jousting, to playing pranks, weightlifting, to having a job outside the home so as to provide financially for one’s family.

98 Among those gendered activities that surfaced in one or more of these read-aloud discussions, the following were conceptualized as female-centered: ballet, field hockey, playing the flute, weaving/sewing/embroidery, performing motherhood (and related domestic responsibilities at home), and caring for (i.e., mothering) nature.

99 given the systemic roots of male privilege that populate our past and (though hopefully to a lesser degree) present as a people
For this reason especially, it seems important to take heed of any discursive exchanges that suggest forward progress as well – where perhaps long-established imbalances might be giving way toward more equitable arrangements. In this regard, I found it interesting that an activity such as ballet was characterized (twice by one boy, and with no indication of anyone flinching or disputing this) as a sport, on equal (albeit slippery) footing with ice hockey, amid the discussions in regard to Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare.

RACHEL: And, and- but in the end, what did they learn? What did they learn?

andrew: All sports aren’t easy.

RACHEL: Okay they learned that ... What else did they learn? Andrew?

andrew: I’ve actually done this before ‘cause I do multiple sports. That other sports can teach you other things. Like, uh- when I do football like I have to practice my footwork to like juke. And then in soccer we- you just have to try to [apply these skills] with a ball at your feet.

I feel certain this exchange would never have gone uncontested when and where I attended third grade100 (as more than two decades have since passed). At some level, I had become almost accustomed to – and this is speaking not just to my experience as an elementary student, but also to that of my years as a elementary teacher (just five years ago) – hearing of activities like dance, cheerleading, jump rope, and the like described as something inherently other than (and, as such, less than) a sport.

Another step forward, perhaps, comes in regard to the fact my data reveal at least some sense of elasticity associated with gendered activities. By this I mean to say that the discourses taken up by the children and adults in this study generally did not suggest that hard and fast rules of gender-exclusivity were inextricably bound to these activities. In fact, it seemed students and teachers alike took enthusiastic notice of knowing firsthand that there are/were exceptions to most any rule (e.g., a girl on the wrestling team and a boy they know who takes dance classes) when it comes to gendered activities.

100 Admittedly, I suspect that I would have challenged this notion myself, back then.
Hold on, what was the first question?

RACHEL: The first question was why do you think people thought it was going to be such a disaster when they did it? Are there things that we think of that only boys do...

*patricia*: And girls do?

RACHEL: Okay talk with your partners about that. Talk with your partners about that.

{Rachel allows time for students to have brief think-pair-share discussions before returning to the large-group format. This time, Rachel tries to work her way into a group or two, joining in the discussion to model for other groups what “on-task” looks like.}

RACHEL: ... Okay we- guys, we have just a few minutes to talk here so go ahead. Blaire, what were you going to share?

blaire: ... I used to do ballet a lot and well, like, there was once a boy who did it there.

RACHEL: So boys do ballet but a lot of the times we think of it as maybe only...

{Several students finish Rachel’s sentence for her i.e., “a girl thing to do.”} And what? Yeah. But you have some evidence that boys do ballet. Oh and- and Jared, not many girls do wrestling right?

jared: Yeah but there are few that do wrestle. I wrestled a girl.

*patrick*: Oh, wow

evan: There’s sometimes a different league where just girls wrestle other girls and boys wrestle other boys

RACHEL: That might be an idea...

... evan: Well I saw two girls on TV and they played hockey and they were in one- and they were both on a team with the boys. And they, like, played better than every other player on their team.

In this excerpt, it seems that seeing is indeed believing; a number of children took pride in their ability to disprove careless generalizations as “untrue” stereotypes, drawing specifically upon what they have witnessed, and as such learned, firsthand (be it in person or on TV, etc.).

Having acknowledged all this, still what never escapes the language (in my reading of it, at least) is the pervasive sense that there indeed were/are existing rules present – very much in the

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101 Of note, this last remark actually introduces what I describe to be the third discursive strand of the binary notions theme: gendered (cap)abilities

102 I use the term “genderizations” to describe generalizations made specifically about gender.
air (and still stirring it). Deviations from the normative were, in fact, recognized as such – departures from an establish (and relatively unmoved) way of imagining and experiencing the world. In a sense, while their atypical examples do account for some increased points of flexibility and even possibility (beyond, for instance, what a researcher might have stood to capture throughout much of even the twentieth century), still these exceptions serve a second purpose as well. They indeed provide additional reminders, in fact, of the continued existence of a presumed and binding referential normative.

What’s more, I was impressed to observe the level of sophistication with which students and their teachers made sense of the genderalizations for what they do and do not stand to mean. For instance, when discussing the statistical reality that most people who play football really are indeed boys and men, I found it noteworthy that their conversations evidenced consideration of the potential effects of such statistics to “steer the cycle” (so to speak) in the sense that many girls might not ever try football because they were/are not aware they can\textsuperscript{103}.

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Evan: \(\text{... Girls do play hockey. I’ve seen several girls play hockey very, very well. There’s more boys that play hockey though than girls that play hockey.}\)

RACHEL: \(\text{But you’ve seen girls do it very, very well. I think Evan has a point here. He said that girls maybe are interested in other stuff. But I have a question for you. Maybe sometimes girls don’t know that they’re interested or can do something because they haven’t tried it.}\)

*patricia*: \(\text{Yeah, I guess I never tried it.}\)

... \(\text{...}\)

kendra: \(\text{Sometimes I think of like volleyball as a girl’s sport. But my, one of my cousins played volleyball and like five of them are boys and five of them are girls.}\)

RACHEL: \(\text{I have a question for you. Why do you think Patricia Polacco wrote this book \textit{[Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare]}? Why do you think she wrote the book? What do you think she wanted people to- to get? ... You know how she [the author, Polacco] does autobiography, yes? This is based on a true story. Lori? Oh wh- why do you think she wrote it? Kendra?}\)

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\textsuperscript{103} By contrast, the prospect of boys who never pursue prospects of taking ballet classes need not be attributed to their not knowing boys/men could participate, but instead to the presumptive explanation one boy offered that to do so is probably just “not their style” for most boys.
ʻCause- it's because it's pretty much just saying that you can do anything if
you put your mind to it and it doesn't matter if- it doesn't matter if most
people say like ‘it’s a boy’s sport or a girl sport.

By contrast, the explanation for why some boys choose not to participate in ballet is not because
they doubt that to do so would be possible – but to do so would be undesirable.

Well actually boys can ‘cause I’ve seen boys do ballet. But also boys just
don’t for some reason because they think that it’s not their style or they kind of . . .

But maybe if they partly . . .

. . . not what they want to do.

Yeah but maybe it’s partly given that that’s what people think. And so boys
don’t try stuff.

Yeah because they don’t want to do it cause they think that the way that
they do it that they won’t like it because it’s not their style. They don’t like
doing stuff that way. They think it’s kind of... {trails off}

I guess it stands to reason that if the exception were not just that – a statistical irregularity
– the very nature of a given gendered activity might change toward something more neutral. For
instance, in the United States, soccer was once considered by many to be a boy sport. However,
by today’s standards – and certainly thanks in no small part to our women’s national team being
far more successful (e.g., winning multiple world cup titles) internationally than any of our men’s
teams have been – there may be just as many girls as boys who play on teams from any given
class. More often than not, it seems that convention and connotation work in tandem to assure the
continuation of certain cultural attitudes surrounding any number of activities, and change,
though it does come, does not happen as speedily as one might hope.

One other budding observation I will make with regard to gendered activities, before
moving on to the next strand, is that the language of my data suggests, at least in some cases, that
what we do (or, what a character does, for that matter) may function, at least to some degree, as a
marker of his/her identity: who s/he is. When making initial predictions with regard to Rotten
Richie and the Ultimate Dare’s cover, more than one child described the scenario of having
Richie try ballet and Tricia try ice hockey as indeed “switching” lives or places.

Figure 5-2: Cover Image for Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare (Polacco, 2006)

FERN: What do you think, by looking at the title and the cover [(see Figure 5-2)],
ROTTEN RICHIE AND THE ULTIMATE DARE is going to be about? {Not yet
calling on anyone in particular}

*pat*: Hmm, let me think.

FERN: Isaac?

isaac: They’re going to switch lives for a day.

*pat*: What! {Not following}

FERN: Why do you think that?

isaac: Because she’s in a tutu and he’s in a baseball thing... and they might not like it [presumably, ‘switching lives,’ not their respective clothing].

... FERN: ...Any other predictions of what you think the ultimate dare is going to be?
Any predictions? Zane, what do you think?

zane: I think they’re going to switch places and like switch what they’re doing.

FERN: Okay. Let’s find out. {Begins to read}
To contextualize these remarks, the students knew the book to be autobiographical and, as such, non-fiction. It does not appear as though they expected magic to play a hand – the likes of *Freaky Friday* (Rodgers, 1972), etc. My reading, instead, is that the individuals who made these comments (as well as perhaps those who heard them and did not question them) seem to be conceptualizing the activities one does as (re)defining who that person is, in much the same way that a teacher, parent, priest, convict, or even graduate student may feel largely defined by those aspects of their identities, albeit perhaps more at certain periods of their lives than others.

**Gendered perspectives**

Experience suggests that we ought never underestimate the degree to which our positions and perspectives shape the way we read and/or respond to the world around us. Whether alluding to Gray’s (1993) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* or to the identity politics of race, class, and gender that surrounded the O.J. Simpson murder trial during the mid-90s, it seems that how we situate ourselves in relation to a text steers our experience of and response to that text. One exchange, for instance, where this was especially evident and clear occurred early on in Fern’s read-aloud lesson with *Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare*.

FERN: *LOOK MAMA I DID A GRAND TOUR JETÉ AND A ROND DE JAMBE EN L’AIR... AND ALMOST 36 RELEVÉS. I GOT UP AND DEMONSTRATED. MOM CLAPPED AND CHEERED, IS ANYONE HERE IN DANCE, IN BALLET?*

kami: I am.

*patricia*: I used to.

jake: *(calling out emphatically)* I don’t want to!

FERN: What were ... those words: the relevés and the grand- grand tour jeté? What are those? Jake?

jake: French?

FERN: Okay. They are. But they’re, what are they? Kami?
kami: Those are—{getting up to demonstrate each position for her classmates} this is plié, you stand . . . it’s like a ‘V’ and for grande-plié you stand on your toes...
FERN: Exactly. They’re different ballet moves.

Jake may well have overreacted in his first emphatic response—perhaps offended by the very insinuation that he, a boy, might take ballet classes—something it seems he wished to distance himself from with a ten-foot pole. He also assumed a very literal interpretation of Fern’s (admittedly vague) second question, identifying the words (and accurately so) as French instead of clarifying (much less, demonstrating), as Kami did, the meaning of each word.

Moving beyond activities perceived as belonging to one gender or another, gendered individuals have, on occasion, adopted positions that suggest they indeed belong to a given activity. I believe I witnessed something along these lines later in that same lesson, this time situated around the ongoing debate comparing ballet with hockey: which activity was harder than the other?

What I witnessed was a series of exchanges like no other featured throughout my study. It is important to note that just as the class, day, and text were each unique, so too, it seems was the prompt. At no other point in any of the other seven read-aloud lessons had either of the teachers pedagogically challenged her students to adopt a position (which, in turn, became more of a stance) in regard to a heated (and I would contend competitive) debate.

FERN: Do you think ballet or hockey—which one is easier? Or harder? Or do you think they’re the same? What do you think?
* patricia *: {enthusiastically and immediately} Ballet is harder!
{At this point, more students raise their hands than at any other point yet during in any of the read-alouds in this classroom. Of note, it seems a number of the girls, typically seated in audience style all facing the teacher, are turning their heads excitedly, making eye-contact with one another; many of the boys do this as well.}
FERN: What do you think? Casey?

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104 I, for instance, was so devout about my love for soccer as a child, that I remember taking offense if anyone disliked the game— at some level, taking it as a slight on who I am, in much the same was as if they said they disliked the Reillys or the Irish.
casey: Hockey I would think is harder because when you’re skating with the puck going to the wall and somebody tries to steal it you’re going to run right into the wall. And it’s going to be pretty hard to get out of that.

FERN: Okay. All right. So you think hockey. Does anyone think ballet is harder?

jake: {begins to call out} Hockey would be-

FERN: {redirecting} Andrea?

andrea: I think ballet is harder because they don’t stand on their toes like that; they stand like right on top of their toes.

*patticia*: Yeah- {holding up two fingers as she speaks} And we have to practice twice a week!

{For a brief time it becomes difficult to discern who is saying what as many students begin to enthusiastically/passionately speak over top of one another.}

FERN: I’m looking for a quiet hand. Tracy? Wait one second, Tracy,... ’til everyone’s quiet.

tracy: I think ballet is a little harder because you have to be really stretched. You have to be balanced and everything.

FERN: Okay. So you have to be balanced. You make sure you’re all stretched out. Jake, what do you think?

jake: I think hockey would be a lot harder and more dangerous.

FERN: You think it’s dangerous?

jake: It’s dangerous because like if you were skating and you fell off and someone was zooming right at you then . . . {begins to demonstrate with his hands what a collision might look like}

FERN: Okay.

jake: . . . well you could crash into a wall if you’re- if you’re skating too fast. And if you lean too much forward then you could smack your head on the- on the floor.

FERN: Okay. So you think it’s more dangerous and maybe a little harder?

jake: Yes.

FERN: Jeff?

jeff: Hockey IS harder ‘cause I played it last year and also you have to know really how to skate really, really fast. And it’s hard to shoot on the goalies.

*patticia*: Yeah.

FERN: So you have played hockey - so you know that? Tell me, have you ever done ballet, Jeff?

Jeff: No.

{The class erupts in laughter – seemingly as much at the idea of this boy doing ballet as how the teacher has essentially nullified his position as the resident expert on the matter. Though it is
difficult to make out all of what is said for a minute or so, there are students commenting that boys can indeed do ballet, but also that most everyone in the room was not in a position to fairly judge the matter of comparing the two activities if they had each only tried one at most.}

In large part, it seems the boys had sealed themselves to the position that hockey was harder than ballet, whereas the girls united around its counterargument. Beyond the fact that each side, for the most part, had chosen to esteem (only) the activity most commonly associated with their respective gender group – something that was perhaps predictable – I found how each group constructed their arguments as well as how they functioned as teams fascinating. The boys’ case revolved in large part around constructing hockey as more dangerous105. By contrast, the strength of the girls’ argument in favor of ballet revolved around its tremendous discipline, practice, and flexibility – skills often not attributed to boys. Each side of the vast binary divide built its own platform, interpretation, and campaign with regard to the debate.

Given the fact that each side mounted its argument in direct opposition to the other, there was a palpable tension in the classroom106. This much became increasingly evident when two boys made the bold move to endorse ballet as admittedly harder than (or just as difficult as) hockey, in their estimation.

{Amid the frenzied excitement and chatter, Fern takes note of a boy near the back who had been trying to voice his perspective on the matter, as his position stood out as perhaps bipartisan in the world of classroom gender politics.}

FERN: Wait one second, Isaac. Say that again ‘cause you’re- I hear you saying some good things but everyone needs to be quiet. Go ahead.

isaac: Ballet is harder because you have to be really flexible and . . . well, yeah.

FERN: Okay. So you think ballet . . .

105 I found myself wondering if this argument functioned much the same as an archetypal “Girls, Keep Out” sign posting, intended to masculinize a space and dissuade trespassers, etc.

106 To be clear, I mean to situate this tension as one of spirited discussion that hailed some of the highest levels of engagement of any text or lesson in either classroom. At no point did I feel the tensions give way to a sense of hostility or became overly-negative feelings directed toward “the other side” as it were, but a pride in one’s position. I say this because I don’t mean to suggest that to create or allow for such tensions in one’s class is irresponsible. On the contrary, by my estimate, it seemed there were numerous pedagogical gains realized as a result of this dynamic.
*patricia*: Yeah you really have to be flexible.

{Again quite a bit of chatter, this time more confused, erupts and it’s difficult to discern who is saying what for about ten seconds.}

FERN: {Urging students to refocus on this as a class discussion – not a series of splinter conversations or arguments with neighbors} Casey, you had a quiet hand up. I’ll wait.

casey: I think actually they’re the same ‘cause- the same exact thing. In ballet like I- I watch my sister do ballet and it was really pretty much- it looked easy. But then, if you’re a professional it gets a little bit harder; if you’re a professional in hockey it gets a little harder. So I’m thinking they’re kind of the same.

FERN: Okay so if you’re a professional hockey player or a professional ballet dancer they’re both equally ‘harder’ for you? You’re thinking that? Tracy?

tracy: It depends what level you’re on.

FERN: Depends what level.

Beyond what the transcripts alone can capture, I witnessed a great deal in the facial reactions and body language about the room throughout this exchange\(^{107}\). Not only did most of Isaac’s and Casey’s boy classmates initially react as if the two had personally betrayed them – taking for granted what they believed to have been an unspoken rule at the time: that all the boys in the class were in solidarity. The girls’ whispers and contorted facial expressions revealed their initial confusion to have two boys agreeing with them. My sense is that perhaps neither side really expected one to sway the other with its arguments. Several of the girls seemed to express great relief at what they took to be two newly-earned votes in their ballot box\(^{108}\) – while others did not seem to know what to make of this dynamic shift – at least, not at first.

Nevertheless, the energy of the conversation changed considerably as the binary blurred, and by the book’s end, several more students (boys and girls) came forward to express their new

\(^{107}\) As I mention in Chapter 4, the gendered seating arrangements in Fern’s class seemed to add to this dynamic.

\(^{108}\) To be fair, I don’t know that these boys were “swayed” so much as that they revealed their positions to be somewhat unique. Prior to this neither had weighed in and it seems their silence was likely interpreted as agreement with the other boys in the room.
position: that indeed the two activities were comparatively difficult, albeit in different ways – some of which none of them had previously considered.

FERN: What do you think that the brother and sister are now thinking about one another? Isaac?

isaac: They’re not so bad at each other’s things.

FERN: They’re not so bad at each other’s things? It turned out that they were pretty good, huh? Casey?

casey: They had something now they’re going to- they are- they could accomplish it and be really good at it and in other ways they could be bad at it . . .

FERN: Okay so maybe if they just tried something new they’d find out they were pretty good at it. Tracy?

tracy: It was harder than they thought it would be.

FERN: So it was hard, but it turned out that it was kind of fun as well. Do you think that they maybe have a little more respect for one another now?

All: Yeah.

FERN: Why do you think that? Who do you think . . . Lia, what do you think?

lia: I think that they have a little more respect for each other because neither of them are now like {mockingly, not unlike how Fern had performed the roles of each sibling as she read their parts earlier in the book}, “Oh, hockey’s way harder!”

FERN: Yeah, they probably do have more respect for one another. Any other comments? Andrea?

andrea: I think they do have respect for each other because now they’re not like {mockingly, again}, “Oh, hockey is way harder than ballet!”

Interestingly enough these reformed positions paralleled the perspectives of the Tricia and Richie characters, who came to a similar conclusion on the text’s last page. When prompted by Fern, it seemed to most (if not all) of the class that the two siblings had more respect for one another, considering the fact that neither, from that day forward, touted his/her activity as more challenging over the other.
Gendered (cap)abilities and consequences

Beyond the idea that certain activities may be gendered or how such activities stand to speak for/represent gendered individuals (in kind), I have found the conversations (in general) on gendered (cap)ability very interesting. By this, I mean to draw attention to the discursive shift away from who can play hockey or can do ballet - i.e., who is allowed to do or hypothetically has access to each of those? – to who can do/play each best – i.e., are boys (or girls) predisposed to be better at certain skills, tasks, or activities? No longer merely a matter of who has permission to participate in given activities, gendered (cap)abilities provide a discursive strand that explores “genderalized” attachments to, for instance, how much confidence one might ascribe to a person’s gender in determining how well s/he will be able to perform a given task. This, of course, invites discussions of ever-present stereotypes (e.g., girls are not as strong or fast as boys, boys are not as sensitive or disciplined as girls) with regard to what is feasible for whom as well as what is beyond the scope of someone else.

RACHEL: Okay. And the other thing that we were talking about is that part of what made the book interesting [referring to Rotten Richie & the Ultimate Dare, the book the class had read together a week earlier] is that sometimes people think that girls can only do some things and boys can only do some things, right.

evian: But, that’s not true.

RACHEL: We- we were saying that that’s not true. But sometimes people think that. Would you agree with me that sometimes people think that?

{All students nod in agreement.}

... 

RACHEL: Yeah. So I have a word that I want you to talk- I want us to talk about today. ... I heard- I heard somebody say, “girls can’t play hockey.” And we would say that that is a stereotype. Let me talk a minute about what stereotypes are. A stereotype is something that we say about a group of people that people think might be true for everybody in that group. Usually it’s something that’s probably not true but people say it. People say it about . . .

evian: Is it mostly like hockey is mostly boys because they all . . . well there is a lot of girls playing hockey but the boys just get the attention for it. The girls are never . . .
RACHEL: But if we, we make the statement girls can’t play hockey. Then that is a . . .

All: Stereotype.

RACHEL: . . . stereotype. That’s saying girls can’t. Or in the book about Richie where he, he was a dancer sometimes people say . . .

evan: {finishing the sentence} Boys can’t dance.

RACHEL: . . . boys can’t be a dancer. Boys can’t be a ballet dancer... Today we are going to read another book that talks about stereotypes and here’s a statement. Girls can’t be knights . . . I divided this {indicating the easel, pad, and chart she had arranged ahead of time} into different categories because when we talk about things like stereotypes sometimes people have different opinions about it or different ways of looking at it. Different perspectives we might say. So I want you to listen. We’re not going to talk about it anymore. But just kind of listen to the story. I want you to think about this statement from her brothers’ perspective. Did her brothers believe this - that girls can’t be knights? I want you to think about it from the king’s perspective. What- What did the king say about this? Emma is the princess’ nurse[maid]. What does Emma think about this statement? And then what does the princess think about this idea? I want you to think about that as we’re reading this. THE PRINCESS KNIGHT. {begins reading}

Clearly gender bias and “generalizations” color much of these discussions, which, although not entirely surprising, remain deeply problematic. Particularly with the Rotten Richie text, there was an overwhelming sense that Tricia was hopelessly ill-equipped to play ice hockey: immediately deemed too small, too weak (i.e., too girlied) to keep up with the boy hockey players on the ice.

RACHEL: How do you think she’s going to do?
*pat*: Terrible.

RACHEL: You think they’re both going to do really bad?
*patrick 1*: She’s going to have to put the gear on.

RACHEL: Yeah and she’s a little small.
*patricia*: And, and the hockey skates are different than a regular skate. Did you know that? They have the two skate things.

RACHEL: ... BY THE TIME RICHIE HELPED ME OUT ON TO THE ICE WITH THE REST OF THE TEAM I COULD HARDLY STAND UP. So why was she having such a hard time standing up?
*pat*: She’s used to other skates.

RACHEL: Yeah. Why else is she having a hard time Crystal?
crystal:  

Because the gear is so like heavy. And she never, like- And she just looked-... It looked easier then because they were a little bit taller, and a little bit stronger.

RACHEL:  

And maybe they had . . . they were used to it too.

crystal:  

Yeah.

Not enough (apparently) to forecast failure for Tricia on the ice, the manner in which she was predicted to fail suggests that students imagine harsh consequences might follow females who trespass upon male spaces. Although one or two girls held out hope that she might apply some of her skills from ballet to get by (perhaps even excel on the ice), there was an overwhelming sense that Tricia would be severely injured – punishment perhaps for stepping into the dangerous and hyper-masculinized world of boys’ ice hockey.

FERN:  

{pausing to break for lunch} We need to stop right here. What do you think is going to happen? What do you think? She’s going to play in a hockey game. What do you think is going to happen to her? Any guesses? Joel?

joel:  

I.. think... well, I believe she’s going to be paralyzed and like break every bone in her body.

FERN:  

So she might get hurt? Then she wouldn’t be able to do anything. Interesting. ... Steven?

steven:  

Maybe she, maybe she’ll get hurt and her brother does the ballet for her while she’s hurt.

FERN:  

Oooh, interesting... And, Kami?

kami:  

I think she's gonna get run over by the Zamboni. {laughter ensues}

To a lesser degree, similar predictions of gruesome violence followed the Kalawati character as Rachel’s class read *Aani and the Tree Huggers*. In this case, the elderly woman who reached for the man’s ax – an effort to dissuade him/them from chopping the sacred trees down – invited dire consequences.

FERN:  

*Kalawati ran toward the men. "Kalawati stop!" the women called. Kalawati grabbed the man’s axe. Do you think she should have done that? Was that such a good idea?*

{Many of the students shakes his heads emphatically “no!”}
**patrick**: ... Like the man could have like killed her with the axe. But when he couldn’t like- What about if he didn’t even see her then he accidentally killed her?

What I conceptualize as a discourse of consequential violence exercised against females who have the audacity to step into a male space concerns me greatly. Such remarks were never challenged, critiqued, troubled, nor explicitly addressed – thus leaving the ghosts of those haunting images to cloud the minds of girls (potentially foreseeing such risks as too great to forge personally) and boys (who may come to perceive such consequences as inevitable, or worse still, natural, justified, and excusable).

Beyond the harsh predictions that Tricia (like Kalawati) would be hurt, even when she had the chance to score the winning goal on behalf of her team, her accomplishment is minimized before she gets to takes the shot – after all, it’s a power play and she only has to beat one player.

**FERN**: WHEN THE FIGHT WAS OVER ALMOST ALL OF THE SONICS EXCEPT THE GOALIE WERE IN THE PENALTY BOX. ALL OF THE BEAVERS WERE TOO. “YOU’RE BACK IN ON THE ICE 12, LET’S GO!” THE REF BARKED AS HE OPENED THE DOOR AND PUSHED ME OUT. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING TO HAPPEN? WHAT DO YOU THINK? MAC?

**mac**: She’s going to score the winning goal.

**FERN**: Think she’s going to score?

**mac**: She’s going to have to!

**FERN**: Okay. Casey.

**casey**: I think she’ll score because there’s no Sonics because everybody piled on.

**FERN**: Yeah, there’s only the goalie and her, right?

I noticed no credit nor congratulations awarded to Tricia for her being the only line of defense between the opposing team’s player and her team’s goal as well. By contrast, Richie receives mixed reviews in terms of whether or not people expected him to do well at the dance recital.

**patrick**: I think she’s going to be like break a lot of her bones and she won’t be, be going to the recital and she won’t be able to do dance and her brother will have to go on for her and he’ll be really good.

... 

**FERN**: How do you think Richie is going to do in the ballet recital? Brenda?

**brenda**: He’ll probably be really good. {several neighboring students nod in agreement}
FERN: You think he’ll be good? Anyone think anything different? Kami, you think something different?

kami: Yeah. He’ll be really bad.

FERN: We’ll find out.

A number of students were inclined to believe Richie could be successful in dance. Still others characterized his performance at the tail end of the recital as heroic; this of course, offers an interesting juxtaposition to Tricia’s game-winning goal, which the class reduced to luck or ease.

To be clear, no one suggested Richie would get physically hurt as a result of dancing nor did they suggest he could get injured playing hockey. Instead, the consequences Richie faced for his excursion into the world of ballet were purely those of temporary humiliation. [Note: some students alluded to the fact that it was perhaps only fair that his pride be challenged, given the lengths he went to, to publicly embarrass his sister early on in the book.] More often than not, the students responded not so much with words, but bouts of hysterical laughter at Richie’s very public humiliation on the stage; still they attributed his competent performance near the end of the recital – this after ruining several of the numbers throughout the show – as somehow heroic – certainly more so than Tricia’s goal.

It seems the consequence for females blurring the binary of conventionally gendered activities may predictably result in physical harm whereas with males, more often than not, the damage is to their pride alone. Along these lines, several of the students improvise (melodramatic) interpretations of how humbled and disgraced the male knights [in The Princess Knight] feel when they realize a girl defeated all of them.

FERN: What do you think the other knights who Sir No-Name defeated, what do you think they’re probably thinking in their head right now? Isaac?

isaac: I lost against a girl?!

FERN: They’re wondering how she beat them. Casey?

109 This is perhaps ironic as the only injury that actually does occur throughout the book happens to a boy and as a result of dancing, not cross-checking, etc.
casey: How did this happen?!
FERN: Okay.

casey: Just, like- Why would a girl beat a boy at, like, a boy type-thing?! I don’t get it!
FERN: Good. Kami?
kami: They’re speechless.
FERN: They’re speechless. They don’t know what to say.

Although there’s no way of knowing that these students felt this way themselves – in fact, I would contend that they were role-playing their answers, given the exaggerated difference in Isaac’s and Casey’s vocal inflection and the melodramatic delivery – still it seems clear that they were familiar with the idea that losing to a girl or woman in a physical competition is associated with shame among boys and men.

Finally, I found it relevant, too, that for some of the female characters to succeed in effectively performing the sorts of tasks or activities that male characters in similar stories would typically perform (winning a jousting tournament, defeating a dragon, defending the defenseless – for Princess Violetta, Princess Elizabeth, and Aani respectively), these young women had to think and act differently – to problem-solve creatively, presumably without the traditional solutions available to them. With no expectation that these plucky heroines would match the hero archetypes inch for inch in size nor pound for pound in power, they had to employ differently clever strategies entirely, capitalizing upon their resources and abilities in ways not typically showcased in such narratives with male protagonists. Each of the solutions reflected an alternative interpretation of ability without entirely disrupting certain assumptions about male and female bodies, per se.

With The Paper Bag Princess, Elizabeth’s character outsmarts the dragon, tricking him into essentially conquering himself, albeit from exhaustion, a victim of his own vanity and
bravado. Interestingly enough, the students seemed initially hesitant to recognize Elizabeth’s impressive feat.

FERN: She went to all this trouble . . . How did she get into the cave? How did she get into the cave, first of all, Lynette?

lynette: She just opened the door.

FERN: Okay. But what did she do? She just walked right in and opened it? What did she have to do to get in there? Jake?

jake: Defeat the dragon.

FERN: And how did she defeat the dragon? Lisa?

lisa: Make him tired.

FERN: Yeah she kind of tricked him into it, didn’t she?

{some low-key nods among the students – no sign of awe or admiration}

By contrast, Princess Violetta’s tournament victory garnered much admiration with each class. Perhaps the fact that her tournament victory meant outshining dozens of her fellow male competitors in a physical forum is a significant factor to her being received as indeed a champion. With this narrative, masculinity wins out, and does so even on masculine terms (i.e., she did not find a way around competing in the tournament, she simply found a way to win it), albeit in a female body.

Feminized identities in action

Moving from the standing ovation awarded as masculinized ideals are realized toward the multifaceted reception of feminized identities illuminated (and interpreted) – a sharp shift in tone from deepest blues to brightest pinks – is a transition I neither make easily nor take lightly. Still my sense is that the first theme {BINARY CONVENTIONS} makes room for this {FEMINIZED IDENTITIES} as the second, following the swift pendulum swing/curve/slice associated with
gendered binaries as a construct: identities defined as much in relation to perceived extremes along the masculine-feminine continuum as the flight of the curve itself. Given the tilted scales of privilege in Western societies privileging the masculine, my decision to explore the feminine ends of the gendered spectrum is indeed deliberate; I mean to investigate what is happening with femininity, particularly when it is given a name and form to embody/personify it.

My feminized identities theme is particularly unique for a number of reasons, not the least of which being that its two discursive strands {PRINCESS- and SISSY-TALK} neither overlap nor explicitly intersect with one another... at least not in a customary fashion. In a sense, this pairing represents the two strands in this study most situated to specific read-aloud lessons; so far as I can tell, princess-talk of any kind occurs only in regard to (and across) the two princess texts: *The Princess Knight* (read in each class) and *The Paper Bag Princess* (read only in Fern’s room). After all, with “princess” in the title of each – much less having a princess character in the lead-protagonist role for each narrative – perhaps it is no surprise that princess-talk spilled out predictably around (just) those books.

By contrast, the vast majority of distinguishable sissy-talk incidents reside solely in Rachel’s reading of *The Sissy Duckling*, as Fern did not facilitate a read-aloud with this book. That much alone (i.e., existing almost exclusively in one classroom and during only one lesson/with one book) could draw the usefulness of my sissy strand into question. I do, however, contend that it is indeed worthy of serious consideration when taken into context with princess-talk. This read-aloud, in particular, yielded a tremendous windfall of rich and provocative data, in particular, with regard to a certain type of gender representation that is rarely

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110 It *would* truly be noteworthy, in fact, for any such discussion in any of the other books as there simply were neither princess nor sissy characters (*nor* any approximate equivalent, I believe) in any of the other texts.

111 In fairness, because this was Rachel’s last read-aloud, there is no way of knowing if some of the sissy talk might have surfaced with regard to other texts, had she sequenced read-aloud texts differently.
acknowledged, much less celebrated, in much of children’s literature. Indeed, it is rare for children’s books to present feminine boys at all, much less in a favorable light.

Toward these ends, I make the distinction of crediting the presence of certain character types with playing a far more significant role in surfacing my feminized identities theme than ought to be attributed merely to the books themselves; furthermore, I believe I can justify this position for several reasons. First of all, these character types (and not their books of residence) are what speak most to my feminist curiosity in terms of looking to see what is happening with femininity. Also, given that princess archetypes are known to serve as culturally epitomized representations of femininity, listening for patterns of princess talk – some even before we meet the Elizabeth or Violetta characters – makes a great deal of sense. Folding in femininity with a male representation allows for interesting comparisons to be drawn across the separate strands, bringing them into conversation with one another in a unique way.

Something else these character types offer is the safety of scrutiny from a distance. By this I mean to say that class conversations revealed no indication that anyone in either room self-identified as a princess or sissy. Not having an “out” sissy or princess present in the room allowed all the students (and indeed the teachers) to speak to/of such identities without concern for stepping on anyone’s tail or toes personally. As such, each teacher allowed noticeably more time and space within these respective lessons – doing so in a manner unlike anything I saw them exercise pedagogically throughout the entire study – for each class, as a whole, to weigh in with responses to conceptual prompts like: What do you think it means to be a sissy? and What do you think of when you think of a princess?

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112 It is impossible to say with certainty that there were no “sissies” in either class; however, no one spoke up to self-identify as such in any point of the study. By contrast, the teacher could feel relatively certain that none of the children were actual princesses, having met each of their families, etc.
**Princess-talk**

Given the sheer number of times that princess characters appear in fairytales, not to mention their prevalence in children’s shows, movies, and all things Disney, it is not unreasonable to imagine that a middle-class third grader in the U.S. may have come into contact with at least 100 different (white) princess representations by third grade – perhaps that many before kindergarten even. In light of this, like Fern, I was especially curious to hear what generalizable ideas about princesses the students might have retained in this regard.

FERN: When you think of a princess I want you to picture in your mind right now a princess. And what are you picturing in your mind when you think of a princess? Or what do you think of when you think of a princess? What are you thinking of? Kami?

kami: A nice dress, nice shoes- ... Nice and clean and have a nice crown.

FERN: Nice dress, nice shoes, has a nice crown on her head.

kami: Not dirty.

FERN: Not dirty. Good. What do you think, Lia, when you picture a princess? What are you picturing? Or when you think of a princess what do you think about?

lia: I usually think of a nice-pretty girl in a fancy dress and she’s always smiling.

FERN: Okay good. Kayla?

kayla: I think of like a 16 year old girl who...

FERN: Okay, a young girl-

kayla: Yeah, who’s wearing a nice dress and-

*patricia*: {interrupting, directs toward her neighbor} You’re picturing Sleeping Beauty!

kayla: I AM! {giggles}

FERN: So you’re picturing Sleeping Beauty, the princesses that you already know from Disney. Good. Jake?

jake: ... I practically always think about Cinderella when I see them.

{A number of students respond “me too” or the like, clarifying which princess characters tend to come to mind for them most.}

... FERN: Andrea?

andrea: I’m thinking of like a pink dress and jewelry, nice clothes like what a girl would wear to a prom.
FERN: Okay, Ellen?
ellen: I think of a nice girl and she’s clean and that’s all.
FERN: Okay. And one more... Isaac?
isaac: I think of a rich girl wearing a nice dress and crown.

What is immediately apparent is that much of the initial focus revolves primarily around how a princess is/can be expected to look\textsuperscript{113}. Clothing and accessories, in particular, seem to be the key indicators of performing the role correctly; by picking out her princess shoes, dress, crown, and jewelry, her ensemble is complete – it is practically a uniform, given how consistently the students seemed to be choosing items from a shared catalogue. Classed especially by the language of the look being “fancy” and the princess being “rich,” I found Andrea’s remark about the outfit looking \textit{like what a girl would wear to prom} [especially when paired with Kayla’s suggestion of the princess as a teenager] of particular interest. Were they just playing dress up for/with the princess character, or did some of this hint at trying items on and projecting looks that might become them as a young woman, attending formal and/or romantic occasions on their own accord? More than just the clothes she wears – although it is difficult to tell much else about her in this initial exchange – the students also suggest she be rather neat, clean, and pretty. I have to wonder how many of the girls in the class might have been compared to a princess when dressed and ready for a special, formal occasion (e.g., a family wedding).

In addition to the detailed description of her physical appearance, there exists the vague, yet ever-present impression that \textit{everything} in the life of a princess (including the princess herself) will inevitably be “nice.” She is “always smiling” after all - perhaps, in a world that takes happily ever after endings for granted, we can generally expect a friction-free \textit{Stepford} (Scherick & Forbes, 1975) existence. In fact, beyond smiling, there seems to be a lack of \textit{verbs} in her life. I

\textsuperscript{113} To be fair, some of Fern’s initial series of questions involved the expression “picture in your mind” etc. It is not such a stretch to imagine her third-graders reading this as an invitation for specifically visually-oriented responses in an effort to recreate the literal picture in their collective mind.
see no indication here (in the above exchange) that suggests what a princess’s personality might actually be like, what she does all day, what she does for fun, what her goals, dreams, and/or aspirations are, etc. Instead, I see evidence of a specific archetype as well as recognition of when such an archetype may have been disrupted (see below).

FERN: All right. Do you think this girl here, pointing to the girl in the paper bag minidress with unkempt hair, ashen skin, and a misshapen crown/tiara [Princess Elizabeth] on the cover of the THE PAPER BAG PRINCESS do you think she’s the princess?

All: Yes.

FERN: Casey?

casey: Yes, but she doesn’t very look like one.

FERN: Okay she maybe she doesn’t look like your ordinary princes. Let’s find out what happens in The Paper Bag Princess.

One week later and with a different princess book, we see how the conversation continues in regard to there being a stable princess archetype as well as deviations from that iconic image.

FERN: Okay. Take a look at this cover; displays THE PRINCESS KNIGHT for all to see; do you think she’s like any ordinary princess? Think about last week. We read what book? Who remembers the book that we read? Who remembers the book? Ellen?


FERN: {nodding} The Paper Bag Princess. And we talked about, we pictured in our mind what a princess is and you told me what you thought of a princess, what you thought about... Do you think that the Princess Knight is going to be like any ordinary princess?

All: No.

FERN: Some of you are shaking your head. Why not, do you think? I need a quiet hand. ... Back to my question. Do you think that she is like any ordinary princess?

The students, all of whom recall the school librarian having read this book to them the previous year, did not show much interest in addressing this question in much detail, perhaps taking for granted that the princess shown in a suit of armor was reason enough. Fern, however, revisits this
question after finishing the book with the class, and their answers reveal still more ways in which Princess Violetta proves to be an atypical princess.

**FERN:** So do you think that she was an average princess?

**All:** No.

**Patricia:** Not, not at all!

**FERN:** Why do you say that, at all?

**Patricia:** Because usually, um, her [the average princess’] parents make the arrangements for her to marry someone she doesn’t love... And she just has girl stuff to do and doesn’t do boys stuff and she doesn’t – she just does girl stuff.

**FERN:** Yeah, she [Violetta] kind of took charge of herself and she kind of set the rules and said I will not do that. Perfect. Andrea, go ahead.

**Andrea:** No, because princesses are usually sort of primpy and stuff... and be a girly girl - not joust at all. . .

**FERN:** All right.

It seems the students have come a long way in terms of appreciating other aspects of the princess archetype, presumably more alert to what those aspects might be after reading and discussing two atypical princess narratives within a week of one another. Instead of the unblemished notion of archetypal princesses as the epitome of femininity idealized, the students take note of structural limitations even a princess may face. They draw attention to the fact that the expectations imposed upon storybook princesses do not allow for much wiggle room in terms of gendered freedoms. Wearing pretty pink dresses can be lovely but it is not always compatible with other activities that she may indeed find fun. Likewise, the fact that a storybook princess may have little to no say about whom she marries was entirely new terrain for them to discuss. I revisit this idea later when I discuss the informed outsiders theme– where we come to understand adult relationships through the eyes, eras, and mouths of children.

Finally, it seems valuable to consider feminized identities in juxtaposition to their foil representations: princesses with knights. In contrast to initial description the class provided for
princesses as glorified mannequins (“nice” and dressed to the nines), it seems the students speak of knights in markedly similar, yet different terms in their discussion of The Princess Knight.

**FERN:** What’s a knight? {pauses} What’s a knight? Blaire, what is a knight?

**blaire:** Knights are people-like, people that are dressed in armor and they, like, have to fight bad guys and stuff.

**FERN:** Okay they’re always . . .

**blaire:** And usually they are in fairy tales.

**FERN:** Okay they are usually in fairy tales.

**jake:** {overlapping side conversation among a pair of boys sitting near one another.} They’re real!

**patrick***: Oh yeah?

**jake:** Yeah, in the Mid-Medieval Times.

**FERN:** They’re dressed in armor. Like that? {POINTS TO THE COVER OF THE PRINCESS KNIGHT} But- Isaac?

**isaac:** {very quiet and difficult to hear} They’re like warriors.

**FERN:** Boys, did you hear that? Say that again Isaac.

**isaac:** They’re like warriors.

Here again, students speak first of what knights wear. However, I am convinced they see the armor as serving a utilitarian purpose. In contrast to their princess-talk, it is clear that these students have a sense of what knights in fact do. Perhaps oversimplified as warriors that fight bad guys, still there is a general understanding of their lives being filled with actual verbs.

This point brings me to my second observation about knight-talk in relation to princess-talk. Although both are common figures in many fairytales, students made the distinction that knights are and were real. In the follow-up interview I conducted with Fern, I asked if she thought the children understood that princesses, too, were and are real. Fern suspected, as did I, that the students probably did not realize this. She talked about planning to clarify this in the coming weeks, perhaps introducing some contemporary figures like Lady Diana to help move the princess archetype beyond the lofty towers of fairytale or damsels in distress of Disney lore.
Interestingly enough, juxtaposing talk of princesses with that of princes revealed still another salient point as well.

FERN: “**RONALD,**” SAID ELIZABETH, “**YOUR CLOTHES ARE REALLY PRETTY AND YOUR HAIR IS VERY NEAT. YOU LOOK LIKE A REAL PRINCE. BUT YOU ARE A BUM. THEY DIDN’T GET MARRIED AFTER ALL.** What does Elizabeth think of Ronald here?

*patricia*: What the-?!

FERN: What does Elizabeth think of Ronald? Jeff?

jeff: Umm, not a very good prince and not very convincing?

FERN: Not very really a prince and not convincing.

As with princesses, here again we see that there are expectations for how a prince ought to look – expectations, it would seem, Ronald indeed satisfies. However, the role of prince demands more in its performance than looks alone; not only does Elizabeth think he falls short of her ideals for the likes of a (true) prince, but Jeff remarks that Ronald is *unconvincing* as a prince. Fern might have pursued this a bit more – perhaps probing for clarification about what *verbs* would lead to a more convincing performance of the prince archetype – but she did not. Instead, she facilitated a brief discussion in regard to why he might not be a good match for Elizabeth as a spouse [something I revisit with my fourth theme]. However, there remains no clear sense of what makes for a proper prince – only what does not (in Ronald’s performance of the role). Given that none of the students or teachers in either classroom were royalty, nor are they likely to regularly interact with the likes of such nobles, it is probably less pressing for them to understand what it means to be a good prince than it is to appreciate the kinds of gendered identities they might conceivable find within themselves or a classmate/friend at present or in the non-too-distant future.
While I am in the habit of interpreting identity discourses in comparative juxtaposition to the discussions of/around their foil character types, it seems valuable to consider the way “tomboy” and “sissy” narratives function in classroom discussions. While discussing gendered activities in light of reading *Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare*, the discussion in Rachel’s class at one point took an interesting turn in a pointedly different, new direction.

*Having just allotted time for students to think-pair-share with their neighbors in regard to assumptions about gendered activities, the class checks in with one another as a group.*

RACHEL: ... Okay let’s talk a minute about what you were thinking. Sunjén, what were you thinking? {No response so Rachel directs her question to his think-pair-share partner} What were you guys thinking, Nicolas?

Nicolas: That boys usually only do football.

RACHEL: That boys only usually do football. But I have a question for you. Are there some girls in here that like to play football?

All: Yeah. {Many students begin to point or gesture to Kendra, who, in turn, smiles at the recognition.}

RACHEL: Kendra, Kendra, you like to, don’t you?

Kendra: Yeah. I love football.

RACHEL: And- and I want to tell you something. When I was in, when I was in grade school and middle school I loved to play football with my brothers. It was ... *patricia*: I like to play [too]!

RACHEL: Do you like to play? Yeah.

*patricia*: It’s just fun.

... RACHEL: What were you going to say, Sheila? Let’s . . . okay let’s listen to Sheila. Like I read there was this girl and she, when she moved she actually wanted to play baseball and when she lived they only let girls play softball and boys played baseball. So she made up her own league of, of girls’ baseball.

Sheila: So that would be a way to do it.

RACHEL: And I like baseball more than softball. My dad’s trying to make me play softball though.

RACHEL: But, but you’re one of those girls that really likes the baseball.
Although the word “tomboy” is not taken up specifically in this (or either) classroom\textsuperscript{114}, we see the language move beyond gendered activity to identification in the expression you’re one of those girls. Furthermore, it is clear that such identities are not only present but legitimized and embraced in this space. Rachel exercises no apparent hesitation in regard to celebrating Kendra as an exception to the gendered rule (re: her love of football); the teacher goes one step further, not only legitimizing the identity but endorsing it as she fondly recalls her own tomboy past\textsuperscript{115} in an out-and-proud fashion. Other girls chime in enthusiastically as well and Andrea makes a point of distinguishing softball from baseball in her gendered case against separate but equal policies of access and activity – policies her father wishes she would just uphold.

By contrast, sissy-talk carries a markedly different tone.

\textbf{jake:} My brother likes Cinderella for some reason.
\textbf{FERN:} Okay. Good.
\textbf{jake:} He’s four, he’s a boy, and he likes Cinderella. \{grimaces\}

Here it seems clear that Jake does not approve of his younger brother’s apparent interests; his choice to introduce them is not grounded in pride for his sibling so much as ridicule or shock-value entertainment. Had Fern (or any of Jake’s classmates) inquired as to why he saw this as inappropriate, it may have challenged Jake’s thinking as well as invited an additional data-rich exchange for my study. Instead, Fern chose not to address this remark at the time – a decision that she indicated in her follow-up interview she regrets, having by then watched each lesson back on

\textsuperscript{114} This much, in fact, surprised me because I have often heard students this age self-identify as tomboys or teachers have referred to their students as such affectionately.

\textsuperscript{115} In my mind, I could imagine children interpreting their teacher’s remark about maintaining a tomboy identity throughout parts of her childhood, as having subtle messages about how such identities may belong to the years of youth only to be outgrown and/or discarded for womanhood. Despite the fact that these words could lead to such a reading in the hypothetical, I do not believe these children indeed would have interpreted them as such, largely because they know Rachel to still exhibit many other tomboy qualities (other than football), not the least of which include her fascination with hissing cockroaches, messy science experiments, and mucking about in the mud/dirt whenever she can – often all these with her students.
video for herself. Fern’s concern was with regard to her silence being misinterpreted by some of the students (and especially Jake) as a silent endorsement of his position.

Beyond this last example, earlier I introduced several excerpts where students mention having seen a boy at dance class, etc. but at no point, in either classroom, did I see any boy stepping forward to self-identify as a sissy. I wonder if, perhaps, such individuals – closet-sissies, I will call them for the moment – get the sense that certain classmates would be less tolerant of such identities. I for one, definitely sensed that this may be the case, particularly throughout different aspects of Rachel’s read-aloud lesson with *The Sissy Duckling*.

Not unlike Fern had done with *The Paper Bag Princess* (when she asked students to tell her what came to mind when they thought of a princess), Rachel led into the read-aloud of *The Sissy Duckling* asking students to explain what they thought it meant to be a sissy.

RACHEL: So what is a character trait that is in this title? Sissy. Do you think it means to be a sissy? What do you think that might mean? What do you think, Ray, it means to be a sissy?
ray: Scared of a lot of stuff.
ray: If somebody like fake-punches you *(mimes someone flinching and getting all upset)*
RACHEL: And then somebody might say you’re a sissy.
ray: Yeah they start crying.
evan: Spoiled
RACHEL: Well, what- you- you think being a sissy might mean being spoiled?
*pat*: Yeah maybe.
RACHEL: Okay. All right anybody- Any other ideas about what it means to be a sissy?
evan: It means also what Ray said and it also means like you’re trying, you’re being like, um- all you know like, um- I’m thinking I can’t remember the word I’m looking for. Self-?
evan: Selfish?... it’s like you’re acting like all cutesy and stuff like that.
RACHEL: Kind of cutesy. Okay, David?
david: Annoying.
RACHEL: Why would somebody who is a sissy be annoying?
David: Like my brother for instance. He a lot of times is like a sissy.

Rachel: Well, what- well, what makes him be a sissy? What is it that makes him be a sissy?

David: He, well not all the time but . . .

Rachel: Or are you confusing being sissy with annoying?

David: Annoying is part of being a sissy.

Rachel: But say more about that then.

David: Like they’re always around you doing stuff that you don’t like sometimes.

Rachel: Do people agree with David that that makes a sissy?

All: No. {It is not entirely clear (especially initially) whether or not the students disagree with David or if they are just picking up on Rachel’s cues that she disagreed with him and they simply followed suit with the “right” answer.}

Rachel: Why, why not? Why don’t you agree with that? Andrew, why don’t you agree?

Andrew: Cause that doesn’t mean he’s a sissy.

Rachel: What do you think it means to be a sissy?

Andrew: My sister she’s always whining. Like if you- she has like probably spread out all over the floor and if you even touch like one of her things like this {mimes} even out of there, she’ll start to whine.

Rachel: Is that being a sissy do you think?

Patrick 1: Yeah.

Evan: Yeah really sissy.

Rachel: Why, why do you think that’s being a sissy?

Patrick 2: Well you’re kind of being like kind of . . .

Patrick 1: Selfish.

Patrick 2: . . . selfish.

Patrick 3: Selfish and not sharing.

Andrew: Whining.

Patrick 1: Not sharing.

Patrick 3: Kind of whining.

Rachel: You know I think, I think what I want us to do is to read the story and see if we can come up with a better understanding of what the word sissy means.

Patrick 4: Or a sister, a sissy.

Rachel: Oh yeah, sometimes people call a sister . . .

Patrick 4: A sissy.
RACHEL: Yeah. Sometimes it’s a short- it’s a- it’s a like a nickname for a sister.

*patrick 4*: I call my sister sissy all the time.

RACHEL: Okay.

*patrick 2*: My sister always whines if I touch her things.

{Several side conversations begin to erupt – albeit on topic, these discussions were not as a whole class and, as such, difficult to make out clearly.}

RACHEL: {restoring order} Well, and- and we’re going to start- we’re going to see by listening to the story whether that’s being . . . whether being annoying . . . it sounds like we need to write annoying down {rises, walks over to the easel, pad, and markers to add “annoying” to the class’ running-list of adjectives}

*patrick 4*: Yeah annoying.

*patrick 3*: Right, annoying.

RACHEL: As a character trait. Now I- I want you to think about something for a minute. Hands down because we need to go ahead and get started reading or else we won’t have time. With the word bossy [earlier in the lesson] we thought of times when- when it made sense to be bossy and when it was kind of- . . . you wouldn’t mind somebody calling you bossy. What do you think about as we’re reading this story, whether sometimes people don’t mind being called sissy. Or what it might mean to be called a sissy. ...

*patrick 4*: Sometimes when people call you a sissy it makes you feel bad.

RACHEL: It might make you feel bad when, when somebody calls you a sissy? {nods sorrowful} And I think- . . . let’s find out.

evan: Like you’re scared of something and they call you a sissy.

{Rachel begins reading.}

When Rachel began by asking the students what it might mean to be a sissy, both she and I were surprised to find the students collectively struggle to adequately answer the question\textsuperscript{116}. What was clear was that every possibility for what it might mean to be a sissy had a very negative connotation; this was a far cry from the enthusiastic embrace tomboy-talk received.

An extension of the class’s ongoing subunit on character traits, their initial ideas for what it meant to be a sissy ranged from that of being a scaredy-cat, to a cry-baby, a spoiled brat – from being selfish, to cutesy, clingy, annoying, or whiney. Whereas some of these ideas intersect or

\textsuperscript{116} When Rachel and I met for the follow up interview, it was clear that she had the same working definition for what the word sissy meant as what I had in mind: an atypical boy whose interests, behaviors, and activities of choice were more akin to what people would associate with girl-behavior than boy-behavior.
overlap with the sissy archetype, students were slow to make the explicit connection that sissies were a certain type of boy. Although they hinted that one might call his/her sister “sissy” for short, there is a difference between an abridged nickname and a gendered identity. The students did, however, clearly grasp that sissy is a name that one person might call another and it carries a stigma such that to be called one may hurt a person’s feelings. By the end of reading the first page, students seemed to be closer to where Rachel expected them to be in terms of appreciating that sissies tend to identify with gendered activities more associated with being a girl and femininity.

RACHEL: **Elmer was the happiest duckling in the whole forest. He loved to build things. Some of you like to build things, right?**

*patrick*: Yeah.

RACHEL: **He loved to paint pictures. And he loved to play make believe. He also enjoyed helping around the house and he was especially fond of decorating cookies and cakes. Yes Elmer was one happy duckling doing all the things that he loved to do. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a single other little boy duckling who liked to do any of the stuff that Elmer did. Not one. Yes, Andrew?**

andrew: I think I have another definition for sissy. It means like when you like to . . . if you’re a boy maybe you don’t do sports. And like all the other ducks are-the boys like to do sports.

*patrick*: Yeah.

RACHEL: Might be a definition.

...  

RACHEL: Yea, what were you going to say Ray?

ray: Maybe like if he like if it’s your first time like if you’re playing football and then like there is a tackle . . .

evan: And you’re not very good and they call you a sissy.

ray: . . . . no they’re, they’re a sissy and then they get tackle cause they’re playing tackle football and they start crying.

RACHEL: And that might make somebody a sissy.

**The boys boxed while Elmer baked. They built forts, Elmer made sandcastles. They had a football game. And Elmer put on a puppet show. Sometimes Elmer played with girls but you know most of the time he just played alone. “You’ll never get anywhere in the world if you don’t learn to play with others,” Papa Duck told his son. “It’s time you learn**
TO PLAY BASEBALL.” “HOW ABOUT IF I PUT ON A HALFTIME SHOW INSTEAD?” OFFERED ELMER. PAPA DUCK JUST SHOOK HIS HEAD.

The students are on Rachel’s intended path for them at this point, in terms of appreciating the sissy narrative as an extension of the gendered activities discussion that surfaced in earlier lessons. I do notice, however, the distinction that a sissy wouldn’t be good at tackle football {GENDERED (CAP)ABILITY} as opposed to he just would prefer other pastimes {GENDERED ACTIVITIES} to it. Also of note is the pedagogical strategy Rachel employs in terms of trying to get the students to identify with the character of Elmer – that he is not so unlike them.

In addition to her wanting the students to identify with Elmer (if not entirely, at least to some degree), she looked for opportunities to get them talking about some of Elmer’s more positive character traits - essentially making an effort to expand the students’ concept of sissy (not unlike she and Fern had each done earlier with the two princess books). Midway through the book Elmer overhears his dad disowning him and he decides to run away so as to not bring any more shame on his family; as we see Elmer heading off into the darkness to make it on his own, Rachel seizes this as an opportunity to fish for some compliments in regard to Elmer’s character traits.

RACHEL: I want you to think about some character traits about Elmer cause he was willing to- Blaire?
blaire: He was scared.
RACHEL: He was scared. But, but if he’s going off by himself in the dark what would you think?
*patrick 1*: Adventurous.
RACHEL: Maybe adventurous. Maybe.
*patrick 1*: Brave.
RACHEL: Why did he . . . what, what’s brave about it?
*patrick 2*: That he’s willing to do things even if he’s scared.
RACHEL: He’s willing to do things even if he’s scared makes him brave. Blaire?
We begin to see the students turn the corner in terms of imagining Elmer to have some estimable qualities. Rachel plays a significant role in facilitating a shift in their thinking here. By challenging Blaire’s initial interpretation of Elmer as “scared” – a notion she worries would only further perpetuate the image of sissies as scared-e-cats – Rachel allows some momentum to build behind her efforts to inspire the students to rally behind Elmer.

When indeed Blaire chimes in a second time, we see that her idea of Elmer being scared is not perhaps as Rachel initially read it. Perhaps Blaire is not vaguely suggesting that he is afraid of the dark, of his problems, or of the unknown, etc. – instead, she may be pointing out a very rational fear he may have for being a sissy. That is to say, oftentimes hyper-masculine figures, like Elmer’s papa, have been known to respond to feminized ones – particularly feminized male characters, like the sissy archetype – in unkind and potentially explosive ways. We see this much earlier in the story when Drake117, the bully at Elmer’s school, taunts, threatens, and chases Elmer for no reason other than his not liking sissies. In this analysis, it seem Blaire is indicating her own sense of worry on behalf of Elmer, that his Papa (who has already shown himself to lose his temper easily) may wish Elmer harm.

Several pages later, the tables have indeed turned and Elmer comes to the rescue of his father, who has been shot by a hunter. Rachel seized this as a second opportunity to highlight some of Elmer’s other impressive character traits.

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117 Of note, a “drake” is a male duck.
RACHEL: “FORGET ME AND SAVE YOURSELF. THAT’S WHAT EVERY OTHER DUCK WOULD DO.” WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH ELMER LIFTED THE HEAVY OLD DUCK AND CARRIED HIM TO THE SAFETY OF THE POND. IT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN WHAT ANY OTHER DUCK WOULD DO BUT ELMER KNEW IN HIS HEART IT WAS THE RIGHT THING FOR HIM TO DO. So what do you think about Elmer in this picture [(see Figure 5-3)]?

*patrick 1*: Strong.
RACHEL: Looking pretty strong there, isn’t he? Yeah!
*patricia 1*: Helpful.
RACHEL: Helpful.
*patricia 2*: I think he’s strong because all that work he done.
RACHEL: He did the work to build the house, right. Lori?
lori: Independent.
RACHEL: Independent. What a great word. What do you mean by that, Lori? That’s a great word to describe him.
lori: He doesn’t care what other people say. He can do anything he wants to do.
RACHEL: He doesn’t care what other people say and he can do what he wants to do. Blaire?
blaire: He’s caring.
RACHEL: He’s caring. [These are] lots of great words to describe him. Would you- would you look at the picture and call him a sissy?
The image of Elmer hoisting Papa – a full-grown duck easily three- or four-times his own size – onto his back and carrying him makes a huge impact. Seemingly because he has displayed an impressive feat or two associated with masculinity (i.e., being both brave and strong) the class opinion of Elmer has shifted dramatically. I find the last few sentences of this excerpt especially interesting.

I interpret this as saying they would not think of Elmer as a sissy had this been the first impression that they had of him. Rather than expanding their collective definition of what it might mean to be a sissy, it is as if they believe these acts undo his sissiness - as if they cure his case of the sissies.

As the story continues, the rest of the flock arrives home in the spring, surprised to find either Elmer or Papa alive. What follows in that scene are two provocative statements. The first is a line mysteriously disembodied (at first), coming in defense of Elmer, in reaction to hearing the Drake character mock him.

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118 I wonder if, at this point, some of the students assume Elmer has rejected or outgrown his “sissy stage” in favor of a more conventionally appropriate and mature gender identity. Such a narrative offers an interesting parallel to the problematic presumption that girls outgrow their “tomboy stage” as they become young women.
{Several students begin to laugh}

The students, having guessed correctly, clearly understand that Papa’s feeling about Elmer have changed markedly in gratitude for what Elmer did for him. I am, however, not convinced the students who laughed here necessarily did so dismissively because they found Papa’s remark ridiculous or silly; perhaps they thought, as did 119, that the comment was especially curious – that one does not often hear a masculine character celebrating feminized ideals. Rachel might have asked for clarification from these students, but she did not (recognizing she had very little time left to finish the story that day before the students would need to board their respective busses and head home) – instead, she continued reading.

RACHEL: ... ELMER TOOK A DEEP BREATH. AND THEN SPOKE HIS MIND. “I WANT TO MAKE ONE THING CLEAR: I AM THE SAME DUCK I’VE ALWAYS BEEN. I HAVEN’T CHANGED."

Now did people change their minds about him because he really changed?

All: No.

RACHEL: I am a big sissy and I’m proud of it? What do you think he meant by that? I AM A BIG SISsy AND I’M PROUD OF IT!

*patrick*: Well in Garfield, he says that “I’m fat, I’m lazy and I’m proud of it!”

RACHEL: Why do you think Elmer said that?

{The class erupts with laughter as several children impersonate Garfield saying this line.}

RACHEL: Okay, so Garfield kind of says that, but why do you think Elmer said it?

evan: Actually, he [Garfield] actually did say that.

RACHEL: {Trying to get the students back on track} Sure, sure he did. I want you to come back with that then. I want you to come back to and in, and in Garfield he has reasons for saying that. What were Elmer’s reasons for saying I’m a big sissy and I’m proud of it? Lori?

lori: Everybody calls him that.

RACHEL: So but in his case why was he proud of being a sissy? What did he do that made him a sissy? Tiffany.

tiffany: Well he helped his dad and he didn’t change at all so . . .

RACHEL: He helped his dad by doing . . . by . . .

tiffany: He actually did . . .

119 I confess I had a bit of a chuckle with this line the first time I read it too – not because I thought it was comedic so much as I found it peculiar; it simply caught me off guard.
RACHEL: Stuff that people might say was a sissy, what did he do that people might think was a sissy?
tiffany: He cooked.
RACHEL: He cooked.
tiffany: He drawed.
RACHEL: He drew pictures.
*patrick*: And he played games.
RACHEL: Games . . . yeah and, and . . .
evan: He entertained.
RACHEL: Yeah he was like an entertainer kind of thing.

Figure 5-4: Representations of Garfield [by Jim Davis] and Elmer [by Henry Cole]

Initially the discussion is detoured by a tangential connection to Garfield. I expect what happened here was that the students recognized a familiar cadence and punch line between Garfield’s words and Elmer’s. As innocent an observation as this might be, it is not difficult to imagine another student present – perhaps someone other than the one who made the initial connection to Garfield – could reappropriate the association’s meaning, interpreting one set of familiar characteristics with negative connotations (e.g., fat, lazy) as interchangeable with the next – as if
they meant the same thing. Had she feared the students might adopt this second interpretation, Rachel might have challenged the class to consider how the characters of Elmer and Garfield differ, as a way to also distinguish their character traits as dissimilar. Instead, she made a conscious effort to recover the students’ focus specifically with regard to the book and what Elmer had done in it. As such, Rachel effectively facilitated an engaging discussion with regard to how Elmer’s behavior remained somewhat consistent with the sissy archetype, yet Papa had good reason to feel proud of his son. Indeed, many of the gendered activities Elmer had always gravitated to proved especially useful to him as he served in the role of a caregiver, tending to his Papa. I expand upon this dynamic later as it pertains to the informed outsiders theme.

**Designer labels off-the-rack in action**

Clothing and accessories provided ample ground and fertile soil for gendered discussions to take root and bloom in each participating classroom. As such, and in ways I had not imagined prior to the onset of my data collection efforts with this study, gender off-the-rack emerged as an important theme unto itself – one comprised of four distinguishable strands of discourse that help illustrate the ways that gender wears clothing and clothing also wears gender.

(Funke, 2004, p. 15-16)

![Figure 5-5: The Daily Transformation of Violetta from Knight to Princess](image)
Clothing makes the man (or woman – boy and girl)

American humorist and author Mark Twain once alleged, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.” Though more than a century has passed since he issued this proverb, never did these words ring truer (at least, in my ears) than as I considered these data. As I took up earlier, when asked what came to mind when they thought of a princess, Fern’s students seemed initially preoccupied with describing the ensemble and not the person – less concerned with who might wear such attire than that there be a costume ready for her to wear. Stripping their responses down to just the dos and don’ts of what a princess should wear we find a young woman who is all dressed up with nowhere to go.

kami: A nice dress, nice shoes... Nice and clean and have a nice crown ... Not dirty

lia: ... a nice-pretty girl in a fancy dress and she’s always smiling.

kayla: I think of like a 16 year old girl...who’s wearing a nice dress and

andrea: I’m thinking of like a pink dress and jewelry, nice clothes like what a girl would wear to a prom.

ellen: ... she’s clean...

isaac: I think of a rich girl wearing a nice dress and crown.

The embodiment of femininity, class, and privilege on display – down to the incessant smile she must always wear – I wonder if the answers many adults might provide to such a prompt would reveal similar notions of what a princess’ job demands. Even with Diana of Wales, arguably the most well-known princesses (certainly in the Western world) in recent years, surely there are as many books documenting her fashion choices as her philanthropic efforts.

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120 in the princess-talk strand of the feminized identities theme
Revisiting my concerns regarding a world of princesses without verbs to actually *do/enact*, I am struck by how the ensembles the children laid out for her to wear would likely inhibit or forbid her from any number of potential activities – particularly those associated with active childhood play. It is not difficult to imagine, for instance, how the simple acts of running or jumping, much less climbing a tree, would be complicated by wearing high-heels and a ball gown. Add to this the obligation to stay pristinely clean and we rule out a number of other ways for her to move about, explore, and/or affect the world. It seems as though princesses need not be trapped in towers to experience their options as limited and their bodies confined.

Offering an interesting juxtaposition to such notions of limitation and confinement, some of Rachel’s students introduce the idea that clothing can serve emancipatory purposes as well. When called upon to make initial predictions about *The Princess Knight*, based solely upon the cover and title, most of the students expected that a princess would surely face mockery, ridicule, and criticism, were she to express any desire to become a knight. Students anticipated that others, her father (the king) especially, would try to prevent her from pursuing such ends.

crystal:    ...*Well, I thought the princess wanted to be a knight ... like when it was night time the princess snuck out of her room and got into armor and got a sword and rode her pony ...*

RACHEL:    *That’s an interesting idea. . . we’re going to take just one more prediction so we can move on with the story. Walt?*

walt:        *I think the princess always wanted to be a knight ...[so] she snuck out and got on her armor to show everyone that she can be a knight so she will slay the dragon. And she can bring it back to show everyone that she’s a knight.*

In each case, the strategic solution called for the princess character to begin by dressing the part of a knight – particularly if her goal is to make others see her in that light. Pairing the standard body armor with such knight accessories as a steed and sword – a slain dragon would be better still, but also far more ambitious – all serve the purpose of reinventing her – allowing others to
see her in a new way. It is interesting, of course, that they associate more freedoms with conventionally masculine dress options when compared with the feminine.

I was pleased to see Fern’s students also recognize that clothing and accessories may serve purposes beyond such conventional means as modesty, shelter, or protection for the character. Still developing their skills as young readers, students learn to employ a variety of strategies to consider and interpret any given text. During read-alouds with picture books, the illustrations, in particular\textsuperscript{121}, oftentimes provide clues that stand to potentially enhance one’s reading of the text. It seems reasonable to imagine that the clothing and accessories featured in the illustrations may, too, be worthy of a closer look as symbols or signifiers of added meaning.

![Illustration](Munsch, 1980, p.22)

Figure 5-6: What’s with the Racket, Ronald? [Illustration by Michael Martchenko]

*patrick*: Why does he [Ronald] have a tennis racket? [(see Figure 5-6)]
FERN: Hmmm, I wonder - why do you think he has a tennis racket?
casey: I think I know.

\textsuperscript{121} Depending upon where students are sitting relative to the book itself they may not be able to make out each written word; however, teachers do expect their students to be “reading along” by listening and looking carefully at the illustrations.
FERN: Why does he have a tennis racket? Anyone take a guess as to why he might, why he might have a tennis racket there? Casey?
casey: Usually people had like weird sports – no, not like weird sports, but like some like sports that like – yeah. He probably likes like tennis. And like in some movies they have wealthy people playing tennis all the time.
FERN: Okay so she said maybe it's in movies it shows wealthy people who play tennis. So maybe that’s why the illustrator chose to put a tennis racket there. Good. Brenda?
brenda: To beat up the dragon.
FERN: For a weapon? Okay.

It was interesting to see Casey make connections between how she has learned to “read” aspects of films in much the same way she would approach reading a written/illustrated text. I found Casey’s notion of clothing and accessories as subtle indicators of wealth and class compelling, as did (it seemed, to my eye at least) most of her peers. By contrast, Brenda’s interpretation (that Prince Ronald had intended to employ the racket as a weapon) is not supported in the text itself. In fact, save the fact that Ronald reads as male – and physical combat is often seen as a gendered activity, more appropriate for boys than girls – there is no other evidence supporting this second theory. Ronald had, after all, held the tennis racket in most every picture he was in, yet he never put it to use in any deliberate way. Perhaps a third interpretation would be that he had it on-hand when he was initially prince-napped by the dragon and simply held onto it, not wanting to lose it.

Clothing and/as motivation

On the heels of the interpreting illustrations and written text with messages of gender in mind, the “clothing and/as motivation” strand focuses in large part upon how students suggest plot-driven rationales for explaining individual characters’ states of dress. Fern’s class, for
instance, found a number of creative premises that might explain how Elizabeth looks on the
cover of *The Paper Bag Princess* (see Figure 5-7).

FERN: Today we’re going to be reading *The Paper Bag Princess*. ... Well think about the title here and think- Let’s take a look at the picture- the illustration on the front here. What do you think this story is going to be about? What do you think? Lance?

lance: It’s going to be about a princess with and a prince and a dragon blowing down the castle.

FERN: Okay. You think a dragon is going to burn down the castle?

lance: {continuing} –and the only thing the princess can wear is a paper bag.

FERN: Okay. And Andrea, what do you think?

andrea: I think it’s going to be about a princess that wears a paper bag cause it looks like the paper bag blends in with the door or something {suggesting the bag would help to camouflage her}.

FERN: Yeah, it does kind of look like that illustration there. ... Why do you think it’s going to- . . . Carla, thank you for your quietness.

carla: I think it’s a princess that only wears a paper bag. And I think the dragon is her pet and I think she only wears the paper bag around if she’s with the dragon.

FERN: Oh so her- the dragon might be her pet. Interesting. Steven, what do you think?

steven: Maybe she’s a slave of the dragon.
FERN: {nodding} And, Isaac?
isaac: Maybe the dragon wants to eat her so she wears the paper bag that does not taste good.
FERN: Maybe. Interesting...

Although Fern’s initial prompt called for general predictions with regard to the story as a whole, it seems one answer after another proved to focus specifically upon proposing possible circumstances that might explain Elizabeth’s state of disheveled undress on the cover. In fairness, this may have less to do with any preoccupation with clothing per se; the title alone (i.e., The Paper Bag Princess) seems to invite questions in regard to explaining why a princess might be dressed as this one is. I found the class’ answers impressively inventive; ranging from the bag serving as play-clothes, to a slave’s rags, to a means of defense (e.g., serving as both camouflage and a flavor deterrent, should the dragon wish to eat her) it was remarkable to see how many unique readings a simple outfit might inspire. It was also satisfying to see that most of the scenarios afforded the princess agency in her determination to wear and make use of the paper bag as she saw fit.

Lance’s prediction, in fact, was accurate; indeed, Elizabeth wore the bag for lack of any other options (and for purposes of modesty, it seems). Not only had the dragon demolished the castle and terrorized the kingdom, burning up most everything in his path–reducing each and every item of the princess’ clothing to ash–including what she had on at the time. Retreating to its cave for shelter and rest, the dragon prince-napped her fiancé, Ronald, leaving a trail of charred forests, countless animals, and one very angry Elizabeth in the wake. I clarify these plot distinctions as such because I could not help but notice how some of the students’ comments revealed confused and/or illogical interpretations of the circumstances and Princess Elizabeth’s motivations for following the dragon back to its cave.
HE [the dragon] WAS EASY TO FOLLOW BECAUSE HE LEFT A TRAIL OF BURNED FORESTS AND HORSES’ BONES. What do you think she’s going to do? What do you think? Well what does it say here? Where is she going? Steven?

steven: To the dragon

FERN: To the dragon. Why is she going to the dragon?

steven: Cause she’s mad.

FERN: Okay. What else? Why else, Mac?

mac: She wants Ronald the prince back and I think and maybe because she wants her clothes back.

FERN: Okay cause she wants Ronald back and maybe to get some clothes back.

All: Yeah. [some chuckles]

...

Fast forward several pages to where Elizabeth has effectively exhausted the dragon, capitalizing upon its boastful vanity to render the beast virtually powerless. Here we see a continuation of what Mac had predicted earlier; however the order of her presumed motivations seems to have switched places.

FERN: ...SO THE DRAGON JUMPED UP AND FLEW AROUND THE WORLD IN JUST 20 SECONDS. WHEN HE GOT BACK HE WAS TOO TIRED TO TALK AND HE LAID DOWN AND WENT STRAIGHT TO SLEEP. What is Elizabeth going to do? Someone who hasn’t read it. Kayla, what do you think Elizabeth is going to do?

kayla: Sneak in the castle and get her clothes and stuff... and the prince.

FERN: Sneak in the castle, get her clothes and the prince.

Looking over my field notes, I recall how perplexed I was as I videotaped this lesson. It seemed the students were saying they felt Elizabeth was just as motivated to get her clothes back as she was to rescue the prince. From a logistical standpoint, I wondered why several students’ remarks suggested they had anticipated Elizabeth would somehow retrieve her clothing from the dragon – clothes the text clarifies earlier as being literally burned beyond repair. Neither their classmates, nor their teacher, challenged these implausible ideas. What stunned me more than this unchecked disconnection with logical reasoning was the presumed prioritization attributed to the princess’ intentions – that her rescue mission was motivated as much by her beloved clothing as
they were by her betrothed. I suppose such readings are not inconsistent with much of what the
class had said earlier in regard to princess archetypes and the role that clothing plays in such
constructs. As the read-aloud neared its conclusion and the children all had opportunities to come
to appreciate Elizabeth as an individual, still she remains (in large part) constructed and defined
(in the children words, at least) as much by her wardrobe as anything else.

_Adjusting the fit: Afforded allowance and limitations for atypical male dress_

As my comparative analyses of classroom discussions around sissy and tomboy
archetypes indicate earlier, it seems convention tends to be more forgiving of (if not quite
embracing of) young females who break with heteronormative expectations than when boys are
the ones performing gender out of bounds. This comes perhaps as no surprise, given that many
societies favor what is perceived to be masculine behavior above the feminine – another
indication where gender and sex differentiate themselves from one another. Not unlike my
decision to investigate feminized identities as a theme unto itself, I found the discussions
surrounding matters of feminized male dress of particular interest. I refer to this discursive strand
as “adjusting the fitting” because there seemed to be almost an elastic band of circumstantial
allowances afforded to male figures donning feminized dress in certain circumstance, yet others
where the constraints of heteronormativity were less forgiving. What I have done is arrange those
instances I felt to be most indicative of this strand into a sequence that ranges from minor fitting
adjustments and allowances, to greater alterations, to what stands to burst the seams of
forgiveness entirely.

Among the many characteristics Rachel’s class attributed to Elmer midway through _The
Sissy Duckling_, once he had rescued Papa from certain death, opinions shifted markedly. One
boy, Andrew, drew upon a clothing analogy that spoke to this.
As Andrew introduces the notion of being unique, it seems clear he presents the idea in a
complimentary light – to be unique is not analogous to being strange, weird, or odd, as it carries a
more positive connotation. It is, however, somewhat unclear what substance lies behind the word
in his mind. By this I mean that instead of drawing upon an analogy with clothing, he might just
as easily have said the person among a group whose surname falls last in the alphabet is unique or
whomever is tallest in the room is unique. As such, the significance of what he attributes to being
unique is not entirely clear.

Having acknowledged this ambiguity, I will say that I took Andrew’s choice of analogy
to be particularly gendered, whether intentionally so or otherwise. Drawing upon conventional
Western attitudes associated with the color pink as a feminine color\textsuperscript{122}, one not commonly
attributed to the clothing boys typically wear, perhaps Andrew’s analogy suggests that disruptions
of color are not unforgiveable. So a boy wearing a pink shirt – i.e., Phineas in \textit{A Separate Peace}
(Knowles, 1959) – may potentially stand out as a leader or even a trendsetter, one not afraid to be
different.

Relaxing the seams of gendered dress still more, Rachel’s students revisited this strand of
discourse during \textit{The Princess Knight} read-aloud. In one scene Princess Violetta’s youngest
brother proposes to rescue her from the prospect of an arranged marriage by winning the
tournament on her behalf himself – an offer that Violetta graciously turns down, stating instead,

\textsuperscript{122} And, to be clear, not all cultures or societies view pink as necessarily feminine. Even throughout
different points of U.S. history, the color has not always had a feminized connotation.
“I’d better just see to it myself” (Funke, 2004, p. 18). The pages that follow gradually introduce and reveal Violettas’s scheme, in which two of the narrative’s protagonists were each in disguise.

![Figure 5-8: Two Mystery Figures Incognito [Illustrations by Kerstin Meyer]](image)

RACHEL: *King Wilfred sat down to watch. Little did he know that it wasn’t Violetta who sat beside him. It was her...

*pat(s)*: 

{Several students called out at once, guessing} Brother?

RACHEL: 

...{continuing/correcting} Her Nursemaid. {repeating herself} It was her nursemaid, Emma. She wore Violetta’s best dress and had a veil over her face.

And sometimes women did that.

So they didn’t know that the real Violetta had put on her blackest armor and saddled her favorite horse. And she rode into the arena with the other knights and gave her title as Sir No-Name.

Do you see where she is?

All: Yeah.

RACHEL: Where is she, Stan?

Stan: {approaches the book to point her out} She’s right here.

RACHEL: How do you know?

Stan: Because she has like a- like a helmet and I can- here {indicating Sir No-Name’s pink cape} like her- like what she wears like the back of her.
I was not surprised to see that the students had no trouble picking out Violetta; even when covered from head to toe in dense armor, the students capitalized upon descriptive clues in the text and color to differentiate which one she might be. By contrast, I was astounded to hear students earnestly suggest that Violetta’s brother might dress in drag – more than just a pink t-shirt, but a long floral gown with white gloves and a veil – for the good of his sister (see Figure 5-8). My sense is that his offer to help on the preceding page may have primed the students to guess as they did. I thought it noteworthy that the students saw performative drag as a reasonable and viable strategy for him, albeit in the context of his helping to heroically rescue his sister. I suspect that why male characters decide to disrupt gender-norms of dress is even more important than how they go about bending gender with their attire, particularly in terms of how receptively others respond to such acts/characters,

Following this line of reasoning, how the students in each class responded to the prospect of Tricia and Richie dressed for hockey and ballet respectively is worthy of mention as well. Whereas both classes responded with thunderous laughter each time they saw a new illustration of Richie in dance attire – indeed routinely pointing and chuckling openly at these images – their reaction to seeing Tricia in hockey gear tended more toward concern for her safety or predicted she would struggle to simply move about the ice with so much weighing her down – warranting small pockets of giggling among each class, but no booming guffaws (see Figure 5-9).

RACHEL: ... **RICHIE AND I WERE IN THE DRESSING ROOM. “I AIN’T WEARING THIS,” HE HISSED AS I HANDED HIM HIS COSTUME. “I’LL LOOK LIKE A FLOWER, AND ALL OF MY FRIENDS WILL BE OUT THERE TONIGHT.” “I HAD TO WEAR YOUR HOCKEY GEAR SO YOU ARE WEARING IT!” I INSITED.**

kendra: {calling out as laughter erupts} **The hockey gear wasn’t as bad!**

RACHEL: **RICHIE COMPLAINED AS WE ALL DID THE WARM-UP AT THE BAR. HE COMPLAINED WHEN HE PUT ON HIS STAGE MAKEUP AND HE COMPLAINED THAT AFTER ALL THAT HE WAS TOO EXHAUSTED TO GO ON. “GUESS IT’S NOT AS EASY AS YOU THOUGHT**

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123 by this I mean they did not appear to be trying to amuse their classmates as there was no noticeable giggling
HUH," I SNEERED. WE PEEKED AROUND THE CURTAIN. {Improvising to heighten students’ levels of engagement} Guess what? THE WHOLE SCHOOL WAS THERE AGAIN. RICHTER TURNED SO RED HIS FRECKLES ALMOST DISAPPEARED. Why wouldn’t his freckles almost disappear? Why would his freckles almost disappear?

haden: Because ‘cause probably his freckles were embarrassed too.

RACHEL: Why, Haden, why would his freckles almost disappear?

haden: Because they were red and his face was red-like camouflage.

RACHEL: Like camouflage?

haden: Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah from the embarrassment.

Figure 5-9: Suiting up to Play/Perform: What a Drag! [Illustrations by Patricia Polacco]

Of note, Kendra, the student who remarked that wearing the hockey gear wasn’t as bad, happens to be the same girl Rachel’s entire class recognized as a girl who loves to play football. I remember wondering whether she meant 1) that a boy having to wear clingy dance attire would have more punitive social affects than a girl covered in hockey gear, or 2) that for her personally,
the thought of wearing the dance costume would be more uncomfortable than were she to wear the sports uniform and padding. In either case, I was reminded just how much more revealing the ballet outfit was than the hockey gear – not unlike how the thick, masculinized metal armor Violetta wore as Sir No-Name stood in stark contrast to the veil and dress Emma donned as she took Violetta’s place beside the king.

Although the students clearly find the image of Richie humiliated in the dance costumes funny, it seems his expressed discomfort with wearing such feminine attire reminds them that he is indeed the same masculine boy who delights in embarrassing or grossing out his sister earlier in the book. The idea that he wears his embarrassment as well, in this manner, clarifies the context of his circumstances: if it were not for the dare he agreed to, he would never choose to wear such an outfit.

This brings us full circle to Elmer and *The Sissy Duckling*. As it seemed Rachel had nearly finished facilitating the day’s read-aloud, she absent-mindedly closed the book, thinking nothing of the gesture. At this, several students took immediate notice of the book’s cover – something Rachel had (uncharacteristically) opted not to highlight at the beginning of the lesson.

![Cover Image for The Sissy Duckling (Fierstein, 2002)](image)

**Figure 5-10**: Cover Image for *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002)

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124 as she revealed in her follow-up interview with me
*patrick 1*: *Noticing the illustration of Elmer on the cover* Why is he wearing heart glasses? *looking from side to side, modeling a grimaced expression for his peers*

*patrick 2*: And look, *pointing and giggling* he has a pink backpack with flowers

RACHEL: *caught off-guard* Well, he likes to entertain- likes to be different, right?

*patricia 1*: He looks like a girl. *Much of the class erupts in laughter, pointing, teasing and laughing at Elmer.*

RACHEL: Well he looks, maybe- But that’s okay.

*patrick 3*: Maybe he *wanted to be a girl*. *The class begins to become a bit unruly.*

RACHEL: Well, he- he likes being his own- as Andrew was saying, he likes to be unique.

This was easily one of the most uncomfortable exchanges throughout the entire study for me – in part, because it seemed mean-spirited. In her follow-up interview Rachel agreed with my sentiments and disappointment. Bound by the constraints of instructional time ticking away at the end of a busy day, with important announcements about to pour in over the intercom at full volume, Rachel did not feel she had the opportunity to fully address or redirect the negative detour the class conversation took.

In many ways this was a teacher’s worst nightmare. Unable to seize the necessary teachable moment before it escaped, it seemed as though the lesson itself unraveled before our eyes. What Rachel set out to do with this book from the start – to create a climate of sissy acceptance and celebration within her classroom community – indeed looked to be going so well. The students appeared to be coming around to accept and embrace Elmer for all that he was, redefining their initially negative attitudes about what it meant to be a sissy. Yet, as if by the flick of a switch – the closing of a book cover – what Rachel and I each interpreted earlier as an expansive bubble of thought and opportunity, swelling with pride and possibility, suddenly BURST! The proverbial suggestion to not judge a book by its cover could not have been more apropos, for the class had literally finished the book already, in its entirety; they had come to know Elmer before rejecting him, a character only moments earlier they had esteemed.
By contrast with any other characters in any of the children’s books, Elmer unapologetically embraces his sissy identity. In doing this, he chooses feminized accessories and identifies with gendered activities convention relegates to girls. The fact that he does these things of his own free will – not necessarily as part of an elaborate scheme to rescue someone else nor because he was dared to do so – proves, unfortunately, beyond the bounds of elastic forgiveness. As such, Elmer’s clothed identity is deemed objectionable for it offers not a temporary departure (or excused absence) from the norm but a disruption of binary conventions entirely. Uniqueness, though a quality one ought to be encouraged to wear as a badge of honor, is unfortunately not always deemed welcome.

**Exoticizing other(s) via cultural dress**

By contrast with Elmer, whose unique manner of dress served as fodder for many of his peers (both in and beyond the text itself), I found it fascinating to observe how other cultures (as opposed to othered individuals) were discussed, particularly in relation to normative customs of dress, etc. The fourth and final decipherable strand of discourse I saw evidence of relative to the gender off-the-rack theme pertains specifically to the ways in which each teacher and class employed exoticized notions of cultural dress as a means of engaging with and coming to understand/appreciate other cultures. Given that each teacher’s free-choice book reflected her present unit on the countries of Asia, it was not entirely unexpected to find these read-alouds serving both as narrative tales in and of themselves, as well as jumping off points for discussing cultural norms, customs, and points of departure with Western traditions.

This was particularly true with Rachel’s class as she and a blue-eyed, boy in her class with blonde hair [Andrew] dressed in traditional [Asian] Indian garb to begin the lesson on *Aani and the Tree Huggers.*
Rachel: Okay, this morning for our read-aloud we are going to be doing a special book from one of the countries in Asia. So Andrew, why don’t you talk about what you’re wearing so you can kind of tell them about it.

Andrew: This is a traditional Indian outfit. {gesturing to each item} This is the scarf that they like to wear, the shirt, and then the pants.

Rachel: ... And I’m also wearing a traditional dress from India and this is called a salwar. And sometimes women in— in India wear something called saris. And I want you to keep that in mind, ‘cause that has something to do with the book that we’re reading. And a sari is a little different. It has a kind of a short top {miming} and then the skirt is like wrapped around a lot of different times. Around and around- {several students, including Andrew, imitate this motion along with Rachel} And then they usually, with the sari, they usually have like a band that they were on the top. Yes, Crystal?

Crystal: I know why they wear those. They usually wear it when they’re like going to, um— some type of a store or something.

Rachel: {nodding} Like to a store, when they go—and some women in India wear those all the time when they’re outside. It just depends on the village and the city that they’re from. Yes. Sunjén?

Sunjén: There is someone I know and she’s from India and her mom mostly wears that.

Rachel: Mostly wears saris.

Sunjén: Outside like as she goes walking... or gets in a car or anything, she wears it.

Rachel: Okay and— and you saw her wearing her sari. What— ...and then sometimes the women, especially the younger women, like wearing a salwar like this because it’s kind of longer and it’s a little more... it has pants to go with it and the saris just have skirts. So the pants are a little more comfortable. And Andrew, one of the things that we noticed about the pants ...do you mind if I showed this? {Andrew nods and Rachel starts adjusting his shirt so that the class more easily see the pants beneath it.} The pants are often really big and bulky just, they’re kind of— to be more comfortable. {one child begins to point and laugh} And remember we talked about this before when we— and this is so important. When we are talking about food or clothing or something from other countries we need to remember to be what? Very ____?

*Pat*: Respectful.

Rachel: {nods} Even if it might seem funny to us. We’re going to be respectful. We’re just going to notice that it is different. Okay? Different. Right, yeah?

Andrew: (Pointing to his forehead) Do you have a bindi?

Rachel: Wow, Andrew brought a really important point! He talked about the bindi. Have any people seen, sometimes women from India wear- {deciding to let Andrew share this much} what-, what is a bindi, Andrew?

Andrew: This is a traditional mark that they might go out to like a fancy restaurant and they’ll put a bindi on— Well, I don’t know if it means {you’re] married or
unmarried or something like that... They have like polo ones and normal ones, turquoise ones and rainbow ones. They’ve really expanded the bindis

RACHEL: They really expanded the bindi. {giggling at Andrew’s “professional” delivery as much as at his astute observation} Traditionally- just put your hands down for a second girls and boys- A bindi is- and this is very important because in the book that we’re reading today the women had bindis. So it’s important to- to- to pay attention to this. Traditionally, the bindis are red. They’re a red dot. And as Andrew was saying, now they’re sort of like part of the fashion in India. The women wear them and they change colors and stuff like that. But traditionally they had a meaning and I think as we read the book we’ll talk more about the meaning of the bindis. Did somebody else have something they wanted to say about that? Sheila?

sheila: It’s that my neighbor Pao and his wife- they came over to our house one time and she had one.

RACHEL: A bindi? All right.

As Rachel predicted, wearing and discussing these authentic [Asian] Indian garments served as an engaging bridge to pulling in information about customs and life in India; likewise, the clothing invited talk of gender as well. The fact that Andrew was also dressed in traditional garb allowed him to represent male dress in contrast to Rachel’s demonstration of traditional female dress in India. Rachel also highlighted that females of a certain age might prefer the salwar to the sari – one with a loose pant option (not unlike the pants Indian men wear), the other paired instead with a skirt – for reasons of ease, age, and comfort. Rachel, having volunteered briefly in India to help with a woman’s organization years ago, spoke with some degree of authority about the customs she picked up while she was there. By no means an authority on all things India (and she is the first to state this, as she reflected in her follow-up interview), Rachel saw her initial focus on clothing as serving two functions. First, she saw it as a means of capturing students’ attention in the lesson. Secondly, she hoped that proactively introducing some of the images and concepts likely to capture the students’ attention in the book’s illustrations

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125 Someone from outside of U.S./Western culture might divine similar parallels to young girls not wearing high heels, skirts, or even make up until they are of a certain age
might provide the necessary foundational understandings to avoid disrupting the flow of the narrative itself, once the actual reading began.

In addition to clothing functioning as a means of shelter, modesty, and comfort, the students recognized that certain garments and/or accessories may also serve expressive purposes in much the same way a wedding band or evening dress/tuxedo might in Western culture. Of note, it seemed that the vast majority of the talk regarding fashion and accessorizing pertained to women. I was not sure if the message is that males in India care less about these things and/or, perhaps, that Rachel simply knows more about the female end of the spectrum with regard to conventions of dress. Given that she spent the bulk of her time there working with a women’s organization, she was likely to have had far more exposure to women and girls’ customs.

With Fern’s The Boy of the Three-Year Nap read-aloud, the class dedicates considerably less instructional time to discussions of Japanese clothing in particular, yet there were brief exchanges with regard to cultural dress that surfaced in that room as well.

FERN: ...THE MERCHANT’S WIFE AND DAUGHTER WORE ELEGANT KIMONOS’ WITH OBIS OF GOLD BROCADE. THE MERCHANT HIMSELF CARRIED A CANE MADE OF IVORY AND SMOKE A PIPE WITH A BOWL OF SOLID GOLD. What is an obi? Who remembers? We talked about it. Carla?

carla: It’s a thing that holds a kimono together.

FERN: Exactly. It’s a large sash that women wear around their kimonos. Nice memory. {continues reading}

By contrast with Rachel, Fern has not yet had the opportunity to visit any of the countries in Asia; according to Fern, her knowledge of Japan comes largely from what the district materials provide as a foundation for understanding and teaching the unit. Just as Fern clearly introduced the term ‘obi’ in a previous lesson, throughout this lesson she found a number of vocabulary terms to highlight and discuss – most of which had little to do with clothing. As such, Fern seems to speak of kimonos as if they were something only women and girls in Japan wore – constructed more as the equivalent to a dress than a robe. In fact, men, too, typically wear kimonos in Japan
(obis, too), although the shape and style of those may differ a bit from men to women (or from boys to girls) in Japan.

Returning to Rachel’s read-aloud of *Aani and the Tree Huggers*, the book’s cover image hailed students to make still more observations about dress and accessories. This in turn led to a series of tangential remarks and commentary that revealed how much and how little the students do understand about other cultures, clothing, gender, and how it all related to them.

**RACHEL:**  
*showing students the book’s cover* *Aani and the Tree Huggers.*  
{Almost indistinguishably, several students speak at once, responding to the cover illustration that it looks to be a “realistic” story and that the woman on the cover is dressed a bit like their teacher that day.}

**RACHEL:**  
Oh, and Jared noticed she has a lot of necklaces on and a lot of the women in India love to wear jewelry and things. Yes.

{Inaudibly, one boy (Jared, whose first language is not English and whose voice even the extension microphone often was unable to pick up) comes up to the book to points out the other pieces of jewelry the woman on the cover is wearing – namely her earrings.}

*patricia 1*:  
I think maybe, like in India, I heard all the girls get their ears pierced.

**RACHEL:**  
And the-- the girls get their ears pierced. That’s a really good thing.

[presumably meaning that this was a good *observation* of cultural norms and practices, not necessarily a good policy, per say]  
I- I think a lot of the women do.

*patricia 1*:  
There’s a state that I think you *have* to get them pierced in.

**RACHEL:**  
In one of the states? You heard that? Okay.

*patricia 1*:  
I think it’s Cuba – yeah, Cuba!

**RACHEL:**  
{correcting} So Cuba is a *whole different place* from India. Okay? But that’s- We’ll talk about that more. *A whole different place.* Right, yeah-

*patricia 2*:  
{chiming in, seemingly from nowhere, with an apparent laugh in her voice and dismissal in her tone} I figured out yesterday that if I lived in China my sister and I would be on the streets.

**RACHEL:**  
Okay? {her eyes going wide, seemingly caught off guard by this last remark, Rachel pauses to gather her thoughts before continuing} We can talk more about that- Okay, when- when we do that. Right now, let’s try to focus a little bit on what’s going on here. I know you have lots of ideas about the different countries. It’s good to do that.

Rachel seemed frustrated near the end of this exchange – wanting to address and clarify misconceptions that had surfaced but also *feeling the pinch* of time constraints as more than
twenty minutes of the lesson had already passed and the class had yet to read the first sentence in
the book. The idea that there are areas of the world where rules of dress are decreed and
enforced upon individuals is significant. So too is the fact that these rules are often enforced
along sexed lines and, more often than not, females have more restricted conventions of dress
than are attributed to men.

*patrick*: Why do you wear it (indicating the scarf that Rachel had informally draped like
a sash from one shoulder to the opposite waist) like that?

RACHEL: Well because when I was in India the women either wore these like this and
sometimes they wore them on their heads. But another way they wore them is (modeling the adjustment of her scarf – now draped across her head) these
are called dupattas. Sometimes they also wore them like this too. (Adjusts
the fabric to still another position about the head) Yeah, Andrew?

andrew: They only wear them like that?

RACHEL: They only wear them just over (lays the kerchief across her shoulders this
time). Yeah, the way kind of the way Blaire’s is. [Earlier, Rachel had
referenced the Hannah Montana scarf Blaire was wearing as not unlike the Indian
scarf she had on.]

Here it is clear that that Rachel draws heavily upon her own time and experiences in India to
answer Andrew’s question. Although some of the discussions within this strand blur into the
realms of exoticism (i.e., drawing upon the charm of the unfamiliar in terms of comparing
cultures – often situating practices, customs, and perspectives as interesting, albeit unusual), and
indeed Orientalism (i.e., exoticism directed toward the East yet presented from an entirely
Western perspective), by pointing out the relative similarity with Blaire’s Hannah Montana scarf,
she seems not so much to be acknowledging the influence of other cultures on "our” own fashion
choices here in the U.S., so much as encouraging the students to find similarities and parallels
between what they see as other or strange with what they see as familiar.

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126 By this time that morning, it was already clear that they would need to interrupt the reading for physical
education class, returning to the text later that afternoon, near the very end of the school day.

127 not to exoticize such practices as so different from our own in the West, K-12 schools with uniform
policies in the U.S. are but one example where similar restraints on gender dress are placed on individuals
here as well.
“Informed outsiders” in action

As we arrive at the fourth and final theme, we maintain the perspective of a collective outsider making sense of what s/he sees – this time, not so much spanning the divide from West to East, but from child to adult. As informed outsiders of adult relationships, the third-graders participating in this study had much to say about how they come to make sense of and understand the thinking of their elders. Although this concluding theme is comprised of only two strands – parenting and marriage/courtship – these discursive strands may very well be the most sensational of all. Perhaps observations of how gender works, particularly with regard to the kinds of mature roles and relationships they have yet to assume themselves, are best revealed through the eyes, ears, and mouths of children – informed outsiders.

Parenting

Although none of the third grade participants in this study has yet taken on the role of being a parent, certainly most of them are likely to have experienced being parented. Perhaps this explains some of their initial attitudes about what it is parents do. When prompted for predictions in regard to The Princess Knight, after some brief time to brainstorm with a neighbor, each pairing of Rachel’s students accurately predicted the plot would call for a girl to reconcile her identity as a princess with her desire to also become a knight. More interesting, to me at least, was that many of their responses added a disapproving father – casting the king as a “mad dad” of sorts who presided over his daughter’s decisions.

RACHEL: ... Who would like to share what you talked about with your partner about your prediction? Kendra?

kendra: I think that she’s- her dad’s the king and so she starts to... like be a knight with all the other people. And so then her dad gets mad and he like locks her away in the room. She has to like find a way out- like a knight.
RACHEL: Okay. Wow that’s an interesting prediction. Crystal, what do you- what did you two talk about?

crystal: We thought . . . the princess was a knight and then her- the king knew she was going to be a knight and then he got really, really mad...

RACHEL: ... Let’s take . . . we’re going to take just one more prediction so we can move on with the story. Walt?

walt: I think the princess always wanted to be a knight but her father wouldn’t let her and everyone laughed at her...

Each response reveals that the students do not presume parents are always supportive of their children’s wishes. Moreover, it seems they come to expect parents, and in this case, particularly fathers/kings, to position themselves as authoritarian figures who play the roles of ruler, decider, and punisher as they see fit. I suspect the image of her being locked away in a room – one prediction that indeed comes to fruition in the story – may have been born of all the fairytale clichés with young women trapped in towers. I found it curious that no one mentioned a mother/queen figure of any kind, much less where she might stand on such matters; perhaps all the dead, silent, and/or absentee mothers in tales of this nature influence this, too.

As it happens, The Princess Knight is unusual in that King Wilfred’s stance on this matter is rather atypical – so too it would seem are his parenting techniques for raising a daughter/princess.

RACHEL: **King Wilfred the Worthy Had Three Sons.** He brought them up just as his father had brought him up. And they were taught all the things that he had been taught. He wanted them to be better than his best knights. They learned riding, and jousting, fighting with swords and good table manners too. They learned how to stride around proudly and how to shout very loudly. And perhaps most important the princes they were proud to give orders to their nursemaids, their servants, their dogs and their horses. Then Queen Violette had a daughter. But the queen died when the baby was born. So the little girl was called Violette. No one would dare tell the king how to do anything. **Cause he was the king, right?** Especially how to raise his little girl. So he decided to teach her the same lessons that he had taught his sons. {students chuckle at this idea}
When Fern’s class reaches this same passage their reaction is similar although she asks a clarifying question that Rachel had not.

FERN: ... *Especially how to raise his little girl. So he decided to teach her the same lessons that he had taught his sons.* *(giggling)* **What do you think** he’s going to teach her? **Jeff?**

jeff: **The jousting and everything that they [her brothers, the princes] did.**

King Wilfred’s decision to train Violetta as a knight presents itself as less progressive perhaps than it is naïve; the presumption of course – and it seems the audience of child-readers buy into this as well, given that both classes found this prospect amusing – is that whereas men might be naturally inclined to understand boys and how to raise their sons, they have no frame of reference for raising daughters, having never been female themselves. Add to this the age-old perception that men (much less kings) are resistant to asking for advice/directions and that they refuse to admit when they are lost, and suddenly the stage is set for situation comedy.

Pages later we learn that Violetta opts to squeeze in additional training sessions each night.

RACHEL: **...From that night on, Violetta slipped out of the castle in secret while the rose gardener’s son kept watch for her. Why did she need someone to keep watch for her. Why did she need someone to keep watch? Ray?**

ray: **Like if her dad wants to check on her he might notice she’s missing or something.**

RACHEL: **Yeah. But you know her dad said it was okay for her to fight, right? He, he said that was okay. Why was she having somebody keep watch? Blaire?**

blaire: **Like, just to see if anyone else was coming.**

RACHEL: **Why do you think she wanted to do this in secret? Why, why do you think she . . . Sheila?**

sheila: **So she could impress her brothers.**

RACHEL: **So she could impress her brothers. Do people agree with this?**

All: **Yeah. *(Many students show their individual agreement by signing the affirmative in American Sign Language.)***

RACHEL: **I like the way so many of you are giving me the “yes” signal.**
Here Rachel needs to remind the students that King Wilfred’s approach to parenting does not match the ones they initially predicted – on the contrary, he supports her training as a knight.

Although the students are familiar with the idea of adolescents sneaking out at night, typically the presumed motives are of escape from parental rule – not the case in this story, at least not yet.

Fast forward to the book’s conclusion and it seems King Wilfred’s position has shown some elasticity as it changed throughout the book – so too have students’ perceptions of his parenting skills.

RACHEL: ... Now I want you to think about the king. Just thinking- This is a little complicated. Okay talk to your partner about what you think the king would say [to the prompt, “Girls cannot be knights.”]. So let’s talk about the king. The king’s perspective on this.

{Rachel allows time for students to think-pair-share again.}

I’ve heard some really good ideas. Trent what do you think about the king? What did the king say about this?

trent: Sort of both.

RACHEL: Okay. So in the end the king would say, “Yes, girls can be knights because the princess was better than her brothers?” Okay. What else about the king? Blaire?

blaire: I think in the middle he didn’t [believe they could] because he wanted her to get married and she didn’t really want to.

RACHEL: Well the king kind of went back and forth. What about in the beginning? Lori?

lori: I think in the beginning that he would probably say they can, because he trained her.

RACHEL: Okay. So in the beginning, yes. In the middle, no. And then in the end, yes again. Okay. ‘Cause the princes was better than her brothers. ... Yes, Ray?

ray: I don’t think her dad thought she would be as good as her brothers.

RACHEL: Okay. You don’t think he thought she [would be] as good [as them]. But he kind of-... Why do you think he let her get trained?

*patrick*: Because that was the only way that he knows for her to grow up- ‘Cause he has three boys.

RACHEL: Wow, what excellent thinking! He didn’t know what else to do so he said let her train. And in the end was that- Was that a good thing for her?

All: {nodding} mm-hmm.
RACHEL: Why was that a good thing for her? Why?
*patricia*: She enjoyed it.
RACHEL: She enjoyed it ...

Throughout the tale, King Wilfred’s stance changed, as did his reasoning. According to Rachel’s students, his decision to train her as a knight did not reflect a faith in her abilities so much as a lack of effort on his part to differentiate her upbringing. Midway through the book, his concern was with marrying her off, so he discounts her training as a knight as merely temporary – unnecessary for a bride to be. Of note, no mention is made throughout the story (nor is any mention of this made by either teacher or set of students) of the king feeling any pressure or necessity to see her three older brothers wed. He becomes convinced that girls indeed can be knights only after he has seen Violetta/Sir No-Name outshine every other knight in the land. The students agreed that Wilfred’s initial decision to raise his daughter no differently than her brothers turned out more positively than anyone had foreseen – crediting the fact that to do so gave Violetta access to an activity she came to enjoy. Had Rachel or Fern probed further, I wonder what the students may have had to say about how a parallel tale would go, were the gender dynamics reversed (e.g., a queen raising three princesses and a prince). I wonder, too, how a discussion around wanting to raise children to have as many options as possible might have looked with regard to gender.

Not to be outdone by *The Princess Knight*, *The Sissy Duckling* also features a father figure whose position shifts by the story’s end; with this narrative, however, the students construct parenting as a balancing act between what parents think is best for their children and, of note, what parents want for themselves. The following scene reveals two contrasting and deeply gendered approaches to parenting Elmer.

RACHEL: “He ran away instead of fighting”, Papa bellowed. “He was being chased,” Mama argued back. “In a few weeks we’ll all fly south for the winter. It will be every duck for himself. Only the strong will survive.”
"If you just stop thinking like a sneaker commercial you’d see that Elmer is just as strong as any other duckling.\" \"Elmer is a sissy.\" \"Elmer is your son,\" Mama pleaded. \"He’s no son of mine,\" declared Papa. Poor Elmer heard his father’s words and his heart crumbled to pieces. What do you do when your own Papa calls you names? Like, why do you think his Papa did that? Why do you think his Papa felt that way? Ray?

Ray: Because he- He- He probably is annoyed that, like, maybe he’s like- He thinks every other boy is playing fun- better games than [Elmer] and he doesn’t ever stand up for him[ self].

RACHEL: It doesn’t sound like he stands up for himself.

{A number of students who missed the beginning of the read-aloud enter the classroom and join their classmates on the rug.}

Those who just came back, we’re reading the book called The Sissy Duckling, and it’s about Elmer. And Elmer does things different from the other ducklings. So he and his dad are kind of disagreeing. So why do you think his dad felt that way?

Ray: Well maybe because all the other dads are so proud of their sons for doing well in games and then he’s just feeling the opposite ‘cause he thinks his son...

RACHEL: So he felt like he really didn’t- couldn’t be proud of his son? What about his Mama? Is she different? Does she have different character traits? Blaire?

Blaire: His Mama thinks like- She doesn’t care, like, really, like, what he does. She just like loves him anyway.

RACHEL: She just loves him anyway. Yeah. She just loves him anyway. Interesting. Yes?

Evan: The other reason that he, his...

RACHEL: Oh, why his mom might have treated him that way?

...

Evan: Well I think that she’s considering it’s her son and if she- if she really says negative things about him, it would be the same way if someone else was saying negative things about her. When she wasn’t around and really . . .

RACHEL: Yeah.

Evan: . . . also it’s just like she thinks he’s special in one certain way and she knows, like some good things might happen in his life.

RACHEL: She really thinks that. Yeah, she’s being positive about it.

With this exchange it seem the students believe Papa’s focus is on his own image; he feels his own reputation is at stake and worries that how Elmer stacks up against other duckling his age will be a reflection on Papa as a father and drake. Ray accounts for Papa’s frustration with Elmer,
reasoning that it bothers Papa that Elmer does not stand up for himself; here again it is unclear if Papa’s concern is for protecting his son, or his own standing in the flock. By contrast, Mama is slower to judge Elmer, trusting that Elmer will find his own special path and that others will come to appreciate him as he is – without the need to change. Evan hypothesizes that while Mama’s optimism is genuine and her faith in her son’s potential is real, part of why she may be defending Elmer against his father is that she would not want others to say such harsh things behind her back without someone speaking up on her behalf. It seems the students recognize that parents, too, have images to protect – an idea I do not tend to see taken up with many children’s books.

As the book nears its final page, Papa Duck’s perspective on Elmer changes markedly, grateful for all that his son did to rescue him and tend to his needs throughout the winter months. Following a brief discussion of what exactly Elmer did to look after his ailing father (e.g., tucked him in, prepared meals and drew pictures for him; played games and shared stories with him; entertained him with jokes), one student characterized these efforts in an interesting way.

*patt*:* Wee lhe was like his dad’s dad. He was like, his dad’s dad.
RACHEL: He was being his dad’s dad. Wow, say more about that!
*patt*:* It was like he was caring for his dad.
RACHEL: He was caring for his dad. And his- And his dad was actually . . . Do you think his dad was actually being a dad?
*patt*:* No.
RACHEL: He was sort of mean to him wasn’t he? Does that happen sometimes?
*patt*:* {others nod their heads} Yeah.
RACHEL: Yeah, it does sometimes, unfortunately. But people can change. ...Did his dad change?
All: Yeah.
RACHEL: How did the dad change? ... ‘Cause his dad changed. Blaire, from-
blaire: Because at first he was really mad at him but because, like, Elmer basically saved his life, sort of...
*patt*:* {another student chimes in, in agreement} He did!
RACHEL: You know, and you know, Sheila was using a word. Sheila was saying his dad . . . Do you remember what Sheila said for her, the reason for the dad
not- Not being angry was because he felt like he couldn’t be proud of him. Do you think his dad had a right to be proud of him Jeff?

All: {with Jeff} Yes.

evan: {interrupting} And everybody giving high-fives. And everybody said he was awesome...

This exchange pulls together a number of ideas about how students conceptualize the roles and responsibilities associated with parenting. I, for one, was fascinated by the remark that Elmer was behaving as his dad’s dad. If parenthood is indeed something to be performed, not bound to a person but instead a set of tasks, concerns, and efforts, it is interesting to see what Elmer did was constructed as fathering. The vast majority of duties Elmer performed as a caregiver were more akin to what convention expects of mothers, but typically not fathers. In that regard, this student might have said something more along the lines of “he was being a mom to his dad,” but he didn’t. Perhaps this means that, although he sees the task of parenting as something not entirely bound to a specific person or body, still this student imposes gender-specific readings of such behavior, and since Elmer is male, how he parents someone else reads as acting as that person’s dad, not the mom. Just as we see that people who are not (yet) parents can behave in ways that suggest they were, so too it seems that parents do not always behave as parents, or at least, not as parents should.

The notion that children, too, play an important role in parenting did not escape me; children, it seems, have the potential to make their parents proud. One clear measure of this – perhaps more so than personal satisfaction (as Elmer was initially a very happy duckling until he was told/taught to believe otherwise) – is that public opinion matters. Parents are portrayed as drawing validation and/or shame based upon their children’s successes and social image. The fact that Elmer earns a number of high-fives at the story’s end is listed as a reason for Papa to be

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128 Much of what Elmer actually does for Papa is reflective of what he enjoys doing anyway (e.g., cooking, entertaining, drawing pictures), yet be is marked a “sissy” for these things earlier in the story. Context, or so it seems, governs the reading and here Elmer’s social stock skyrockets from zero to hero.
proud of his son. Indeed, not only can youth potentially show adults how parenting ought to be done, but they also indirectly function as a measure of one’s success as a parent.

**Marriage and/or courtship**

How the third-graders in this study discussed and conceptualized the dynamics of courtship and marriage proved to be more revealing than I could have imagined. At a time when adults across the nation were/are considering how best to define, re-imagine, and/or “protect” the institution of marriage, this was a particularly exciting moment to turn our minds, heart, and microphones toward children, who indeed had plenty to say and no inclination to censor their interpretations of how such mature relationships played out. Although there are any number of potential influences (e.g., family/home life, community observations, pop culture, school curricula) that might steer such readings, still there was perhaps no other strand that repeatedly left me wondering, *where did they get that idea?*

*The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* was one of three children’s texts that prompted powerful discussions with regard to this discursive strand. We see that the book’s first sentence invites a brief, vocabulary lesson.

**FERN:** *On the banks of the river Nagaro where the long neck cormorants fish at night, there once lived a poor widow and her son. What is a widow? Lynnette?*

**lynette:** She doesn’t have a lot of money.

**FERN:** No. Not necessarily. Kami?

**kami:** She got married but something happened to the man.

**FERN:** Yeah. This woman’s husband has died and she’s never remarried.
This brief exchange reveals a number of subtle messages advanced in regard to gender and marriage. We see, for instance, that heteronormativity presumes for marriages to reflect the union of men and women – a husband and bride, not two brides, two husbands, or any polyamorous arrangements. Likewise, we see that when marriages end in death – and perhaps not everyone would agree such unions indeed end at all\(^\text{129}\) – the widowed may, in time, decide to remarry. As such, Fern’s assumption is not that marriage is forever.

Lydia’s guess, that a widow’s income level may be compromised, probably does not stem from the presumption that she has less earning potential as a woman than would a man. Instead, it seems more likely that she was unfamiliar with the term/expression entirely; as such, I expect she employed context clues instead, so “the poor widow” is interpreted in much the same way as “the poor beggar” might have been, were that the referential phrase. Taking this a step further, the text provides the widow character no name at all – as the book continues, we realize that it consistently refers to her only in terms of her roles as an (ex-)wife and mother; the character of her son, who by contrast is named Taro, and the men in the story tended to be named for their careers (e.g., the priest, the merchant). As such, we are reminded that female characters often tend to be constructed as much by their relations to men/children as anything else; that she is referred to only as “the widow” throughout the text (as opposed to “the seamstress” or “Taro’s mother” much less a name all her own) seems to define her less than by any present role or function she serves so much as by her (ex-)husband’s absence.

As the story continues we learn that the widow has grown increasingly frustrated by her lazy son’s (Taro’s) disinterest in securing a job so as to help provide for their struggling family. In stark contrast to an affluent family that lives nearby – known only as “the merchant,” his wife, and his daughter – Taro and his mother are just getting by. Never one with an honest work ethic,

\(^{129}\) my mother, for instance, did not
Taro alludes to a mysterious scheme he has devised to circumvent any need to find/maintain employment.

FERN: “How can you sit here and do nothing?” she cried. “The roof leaks like a basket, the walls are crumbling, the rice sack is empty. I don’t know how we shall live. I don’t know how!” “Cheer up, mother. I have a plan.” “How you talk! What you need is a job, not a plan!” “Don’t worry. But you must make me a black kimono and a hat like a priest wears.” “What will you do with them?” “Oh they are part of my plan.” That is all he would say. What do you think his plan is? What is his plan? What do you think? Isaac?

isaac: To ask the guy’s daughter to go out.

FERN: You think? Okay. Anyone have another idea? Zane, what do you think his plan is?

zane: Maybe to ask the daughter, the neighbor to go out.

FERN: The neighbor, okay. Anyone think something different? Something different? ... Tracy?

tracy: I have something to add on to this. He wants- wants to probably make her go out with him so- ‘cause if like- if they do it, if they would like marry or something he would get some of the money.

FERN: Okay.

tracy: Maybe like the rice and stuff.

FERN: Maybe that’s why she would do that. Okay...

I found it interesting that the students immediately saw courting and/or marrying the merchant’s daughter as a pathway to economic gain. Here we see students constructing marriage as a strategic arrangement - not necessarily a romantic or loving one. Also worthy of note is the shift from Isaac’s and Zane’s suggestion that Taro could ask the merchant’s daughter out, to Tracy’s prediction that Taro will make her go out with him – removing what little choice or agency this nameless and voiceless young woman might have in the matter. Indeed, Taro’s approach is more in line with what Tracy foresaw: disguised as a local god, Taro threatens the merchant, commanding him to marry off his daughter to Taro or she would be transformed into a
clay pot. The merchant resists the pairing – less a critique of arranged marriages in general so much as of Taro as an appropriate husband for his daughter. Although the merchant fails to realize the angry god is Taro in disguise, he is well aware of Taro’s reputation for being lazy; throughout the village he is known as “the boy of the three-year nap.” Wanting only what he believes to be best for his daughter – though never asking her opinion on the matter, nor that of his wife – the merchant makes concessions to appease the false god. Both Taro and his mother realize that if they play their cards wisely, they may profit substantially from this situation.

FERN: ...”AS YOU CAN SEE OUR HOUSE HAS BUT ONE ROOM. YOUR DAUGHTER WOULD BE ASHAMED TO LIVE IN A PLACE AS SMALL AS THIS.” “TRUE,” MUTTERED THE MERCHANT. “ALL RIGHT. I WILL SEND CARPENTERS TO BUILD YOU MANY ROOMS”. AFTER THE MERCHANT LEFT TARO CHUCKLED, “SPLENDID. MY PLAN IS WORKING.”

What was his . . . what’s his plan here? What’s his plan here? Lia?

lia: To redo his whole house and make it more better.

FERN: Redo his whole house and make it bigger and better. Okay. Steven, you had your hand up. What do you think?

steven: He’s going to like make their house bigger.

FERN: Okay. Just to make their house bigger. Isaac?

isaac: He’s going to marry her and since he has that house he’s going to divorce her and keep the house with his mom.

FERN: Ahh!.

{a bit of indistinguishable chatting ensues among groups of students}

*pat* But she [the widow] thinks his daughter [the merchant’s daughter] is fine.

*patticia* What’s divorce her mean? {This question goes unanswered by the teacher.}

Here the discourse of marriage as a strategic arrangement continues, this time with more details about what precisely Taro’s family stands to gain in their manipulative quid pro quo arrangements. Not enough to merely profit from this arrangement, the notion of divorce surfaces as still another strategic option – a way to discard the merchant’s daughter once she has served

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130 literally an inanimate receptacle – an empty vessel

131 In the follow-up interview, Fern vaguely recalled sensing that a student sitting adjacent to *patricia* on the carpet, answered the question for her classmate in a whisper. Fern did not, however, recall hearing specifically what *patricia* was told.
her purpose. The comment near the end in regard to the merchant’s daughter being fine suggests that a number of the children may believe that divorce is perhaps, in some ways, even more personal than marriage – that to divorce someone is akin to rejecting that person.

To be frank, I found it alarming how easily these strategies came to many of the third-graders – not just to those individuals who chimed in to the large group discussion – but that so many of their classmates’ facial expressions and gestures suggested that they, too, were fluent in these discursive strategies as well. By contrast, it was equally powerful to see that at least one child present had not yet become familiar with the word “divorce.” This speaks to the range of experiences and exposure different students may have regarding certain concepts of marriage and/or courtship. Where students develop and/or learn these ideas is of great interest to me; I note here that I have yet to find another children’s book prompt discussions of this kind or magnitude - constructing the institution of marriage as devoid of feelings.\footnote{By comparison, the notion of kings awarding their daughters as prizes to be won – as is the case with \textit{The Princess Knight} – is hardly uncommon in narratives for children, dating back as far as Greek Myths. I draw attention here not so much to the text itself (\textit{The Boy of the Three-Year Nap}) but to the noteworthy class discussion that surfaced with this class on this day in response to it.}

As the book neared its end, we realize Taro’s mother had plans of her own and arranged for the merchant to hire Taro to work for him, suggesting that Taro’s having a job, work ethic, and steady income would make him a more suitable husband and father someday. To conclude the read-aloud discussion, Fern posed two noteworthy questions that led to some powerful exchanges.

\textbf{FERN:} ... \textbf{Do you think what he [Taro] did was okay?}

\textbf{All:} Yes {a few children nodded yes, but only nos were heard}

\textbf{FERN:} \textbf{What did you say?} {Asking again, this time modeling for students that they might all be able to indicate their opinion as once with a simple “thumbs up” or “thumbs down”} \textbf{Some of you think it was} [okay/acceptable] \textbf{and some of you think it was bad}. Lia, you have thumbs down. Why do you think it wasn’t?

\textbf{lia:} Because it was mean to trick the merchant like that because he would never have been able to change his daughter into a pot.
So you think it was wrong of him to trick the merchant.

*patrick*:
Or he could have stolen the daughter and traded it for a clay pot.

FERN:
Okay. Interesting ... How many of you would have liked him for a friend? How many of you would like him for a friend? Yeah. Isaac, you would.

Why?

isaac:
Because he looks funny and fun.

FERN:
Okay so he looks like someone who would be fun. Okay. What do you think? I love that Andrea and Casey and Tracy keep participating. I need to hear from a new voice. What do you think? ... Becca, go ahead.

becca:
I don’t think I would like him as a friend because he slept all the time and I think that if the mother hadn’t planned that, he should get a job and he’d be lazy all the time and, the, the daughter wouldn’t like him and then they would be poor again.

FERN:
So if the mother hadn’t planned or tricked the merchant then he would just continue to be lazy. Good. All right.

It was interesting to observe that several of the students who sensed something was not right about these arrangements attributes the breach of ethics to Taro’s idle threat in regard to turning the merchant’s daughter into a clay pot. Furthermore, this was seen as wrong because it was a promise he could never have fulfilled. There is no indication that any of the students felt any empathy toward the merchant’s daughter relative to this arrangement or to her passive role within it; on the contrary, close inspection of one child’s language reveals she may as well have been inanimate and genderless – an it to be stolen and traded as a possession, but certainly not appreciated as an individual with feelings, hopes, or dreams of her own. My thinking is that the fact that this daughter character was never named, never spoke, and was never presented as having an opinion or personality of any kind, all played a role in why Fern’s students interpreted her as such.

By contrast, *The Paper Bag Princess* clearly positions the reader to identify with Princess Elizabeth – more than a mere background figure, she stands as the story’s lone protagonist and s/hero. Particularly as the tale concludes, we see Elizabeth exercising her independence, agency,
and sense of self-worth, trusting in her abilities to find a more happily ever after than she had imagined as the story began. Fern’s students had some interesting remarks in regard to this.

FERN: ...Ronald here doesn’t seem to appreciate her, does he? What do you think about Ronald? Brenda?

*patricia*: Yuck!
brenda: He’s like umm- only cares about how she dresses and he only likes her just because she dresses pretty.

FERN: Do you think that Elizabeth will go back and get new clothes and come back all pretty? What do you think?

All: No.

kami: No.

FERN: You don’t think she will?

“Ronald,” said Elizabeth, “your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince. But you are a bum. They didn’t get married after all. What does Elizabeth think of Ronald here? What does Elizabeth think of Ronald? Jeff?

*pat*: What the-?

jeff: Umm, not a very good prince and not very convincing?

FERN: Not very really a prince and not convincing. Carla, you had your hand up. What do you think?
carla: That he’s mean –

FERN: ... She’s not really happy with him. Casey?
casey: She feels like he is a- he looks really good, but he’s dumb.

FERN: Okay. Why, why do you think that Casey?
casey: Because he- He is- He cares about what- how she dresses and he really shouldn’t ever think about that. He should think of her...

FERN: ... Do you think that the princess is going to go back with Ronald? Or do you think she’s just gong to forget about him?

All: Forget about him.

FERN: Forget about him? Why do you think that- Becca?

becca: Because he was kind of mean and he only thinks about how, how she looks instead of her personality.

FERN: Okay. Yeah he only really cared about how she looked and her clothes instead of her personality. And she went to all that trouble to help him. Did he care?
All: No.
FERN: No. Andrea?
andrea: He doesn’t really want like any type of girlfriend. He just wants someone that looks good and maybe he wants someone to do his stuff. He never really cared about anyone.
FERN: Except himself.
andrea: Right.

With no apparent hesitation, Fern’s students fully endorse Elizabeth’s decision to dump Ronald and not look back, despite the fact that this makes for an untraditional fairytale ending to the story. In juxtaposition with the self-serving efforts of Taro in *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*, Ronald’s offenses are such that the entire class would cut him loose.

So what exactly are these infractions and what makes Ronald so unforgivable? Based upon the students’ remarks, Ronald has committed “crimes” of superficiality, superiority, ingratitude, insensitivity, immaturity, and an inability to appreciate or care for others. It seems the students recognize these as telltale signs in determining when and why to walk away from an unhealthy and unbalanced relationship. Not only did students cite his shallow remarks about clothing and appearance, but they recognized his inability to really see Elizabeth for all she was, for all she had done, and for all she stood to offer. Furthermore, they recognized his endless list of demands - a pattern as more akin to how he might (mis)treat a hired servant than how one ought to treat one’s friend, fiancée, or wife.\(^{133}\)

By my estimate, Taro commits many of these same offenses and infractions, yet he receives a gentler wrapping on the hand; indeed, several of Fern’s students conveyed a willingness to have him as a friend. Here again, I believe voice and perspective play significant roles in steering one’s interpretation of a text. Given the fact that the text casts Taro and his...

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\(^{133}\) I wonder if the students would recognize any patriarchal parallels between the very gendered nature of Ronald’s unprincely expectations of Elizabeth and how we are only a few generations removed from a time in the United States when many husbands commonly held such outdated expectations for their wives.
mother as its protagonists, the reader may be less inclined to feel remorse for under-developed
characters – the merchant, a buffoon and his daughter, a decorative pot – who may bear the brunt
of the protagonist’s misdoings.

Considering that each teacher facilitated a read-aloud with *The Princess Knight* as part of
this study, comparative discussions of marriage and courtship with regard to this text are perhaps
especially telling. With Rachel’s class, once the topic of marriage is mentioned, I noticed the
students adopting a rather surface-level appreciation for Violetta’s perspective.

RACHEL:  ... *THEN CAME THE DAY BEFORE VIOLETTA’S 16TH BIRTHDAY. AND THE KING ASKED TO SEE HER.* “VIOLETTA,” SAID KING WILFRED, “I’M GOING TO HOLD A JOSTING TOURNAMENT IN HONOR OR YOUR BIRTHDAY. THE VICTORY PRIZE WILL BRING THE BRAVEST KNIGHTS IN THE LAND FLOCKING TO THE CASTLE.” “WHAT WILL THAT PRIZE BE, FATHER?” ASKED VIOLETTA, WONDERING WHICH HORSE SHE WOULD RIDE, WHICH OF HER SUITS OF ARMOR WOULD BE LIGHTEST, AND WHICH PLUME SHE WOULD WEAR IN HER HELMET. “THE PRIZE,” SAID KING WILFRED, “WILL BE YOUR HAND IN MARRIAGE. SO PUT ON YOUR FINEST GOWN AND PRACTICE YOUR PRETTIEST SMILE.” *Do you think she’s going to be excited about that?*

All: No!

*p*at*: She wanted to play in the tournament.

Here we see Rachel’s students appreciate Violetta’s desire to participate in the tournament,
although they make no mention of her feelings about being promised to whomever wins the
tournament. Fern’s class, by comparison, explores this more thoroughly when they come to it.

FERN:  ... *THE PRIZE SAID KING WILFRED WILL BE YOUR HAND IN MARRIAGE. SO PUT ON YOUR FINEST GOWN AND PRACTICE YOUR PRETTIEST SMILE. What do you think she’s thinking right about now?*

...  
*p*: Umm, she’s- She’s mad because she doesn’t get to go to the tournament.

FERN: You think she’s mad. Okay good. Zane?

zane: I think she’s going to go in the tournament and then win.

FERN: Okay. But, how is she feeling right now? Ellen?

ellen: Mad.
FERN: Why mad?
ellen: Because she’s— if she didn’t get to go in the tournament and she didn’t want to get married.
FERN: Okay maybe she doesn’t even want to get married. Her dad just kind of told her that. Andrea?
andrea: Mad because, like he just planned out that the winner is going to marry her. That’s not really a prize for her. It’s a prize for the winner.
FERN: Okay. Oh, good. Mac?
mac: {imitating Violetta’s frustration} Are you kidding me?
FERN: {nods} Tracy?
tracy: I don’t want to marry somebody that I don’t even know.
FERN: Okay. Casey?
casey: Like Tracy said, she doesn’t want to marry him because she doesn’t know him—because if she doesn’t know him she never knows if she really wants to do it.
FERN: Okay so something that she does not really want to do.
casey: Because it could not be the right boy.
FERN: Good. Steffi.
steffi: Angry and furious.
FERN: Angry and furious. ... {resumes reading}

Fern’s students empathize with Violetta’s feelings of frustration, not just at the prospect of missing her chance to compete in the tournament but also with regard to how she might feel about being given away in marriage. Interestingly enough, this class immediately picked up on matters of inequity and injustice relative to arranged marriages – connections, of note, that they had not drawn in response to *The Boy of the Three Year Nap* approximately two weeks earlier.

Certainly Andrea’s remark is what resonated most with me here: “[The king] just planned out that the winner is going to marry her. That’s not really a prize for her. It’s a prize for the winner.” So often, it seems the idea of getting married is presented as though every little girl inevitably shares

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134 I have to wonder if race and geography might not also play a role in how the students identify with different stories and characters differently. Given that the make-up of Fern’s class is almost entirely Caucasian and overwhelmingly Western, perhaps they, too, (even on a subconscious level) are especially inclined to identify with characters who look more like them than those who do not.
that as her dream. To hear so many students — many of them girls, but also boys empathizing with Violettas circumstances — rejecting the presumption that marriage is necessarily a prize in and of itself is potentially very empowering. Even the idea that princesses can indeed lose their tempers — that they can be offended, and even furious — expands those initial notions of what it meant to be a princess and always wear a smile. Perhaps this lesson falling on the heels of the previous *The Paper Bag Princess* primed Fern’s students to be more skeptical of marriage-for-marriages-sake, absent of finding a true match? Casey alludes to the significance of Violettas deserving to find not just a boy, but the right boy for her. This, of course, drips of heteronormative presumptions about what marriage is, but such is par for the course with marriage-talk, or so it seems.

Speaking of marriage-talk with regard to their reading of *The Princess Knight*, Rachels class had a playful tendency for identifying the apparent *cans* and *cannot*s of marriage as they understand it.

**RACHEL:** ... *Violette turned as red as roses beside the castle moat. “What?!” She said, “You want me to marry some dimwit in a tin suit. Just look at your own knights. They whip their horses, they cant even write their own names.” Her father was so angry that he locked Violetta up in the castle tower all by herself. Not until the moon was shining high in the sky did the king tell Violetta’s youngest brother to let her out. “Stop crying, little sister,” said Violetta’s brother. “I’ll make sure to win the tournament myself. You certainly can’t marry me. {laughter erupts} But Violette shook her head and wiped her eyes on the hem of her dress. “Thank you,” she said, “but I think I’d better just see to it myself”*

Rachels students laughter suggests that they indeed recognize the situational absurdity135 of allowing a pair of siblings to wed one another. It seems they appreciate how such a social taboo is understood to supersede the norms and rules of any tournament.

**RACHEL:** “*Where do you come from, Sir No-Name?*” asked the king. “You have brought honor to your family and my daughter should think herself lucky to take your hand in marriage.” {several student begin to giggle}

135 To be clear, I speak here in terms of current Western norms and traditions, cognizant of the fact that taboos are cultural constructions and that, in many areas of the world, and even in this area of the world, years ago, opinions on this matter differ(ed).
*patrick*: She’s going to marry herself! {laughing}
RACHEL: She’s going to... could she marry herself?
All: No!

Here again Rachel’s class makes the distinction that marriage exists as an arrangement/partnership between two (or more) people. One simply cannot marry oneself.

In terms of finding an appropriate match, Princess Violetta’s decision to ask the rose gardener’s son to be her husband hailed some remarkable responses. I feel the need to disclose that neither I, nor any of the participating teachers involved in this study, foresaw this final twist coming in the story. I say this, in part, because so little mention is made of the rose gardener’s son throughout the entire book (see Figure 5-11 for the only mention made to this character prior to the final page). I was amazed to see how many reasons the students in each class provided for why he was such a good match/catch.

FERN: .... Why do you think she chose the rose gardener’s son? What do you think? Steven?
steven: Maybe so at the castle because he could plant a bunch of flowers.
FERN: Okay. Maybe. What do we know about the rose gardener’s son? What did he do for her? Joel?
joel: He watched over her when, when she left.
FERN: Yeah how many of you remember that? He watched over her whenever she was practicing at night by herself. He watched in the gardens over for her. Tracy?
tracy: And he didn’t tell anyone.
FERN: He didn’t tell anyone. It was a secret. ...

Rachel’s class provided several more reasons why Violeetta may have chosen him for a husband.

RACHEL: IF YOU MUST KNOW MANY YEARS LATER WHEN SHE WAS OLDER AND READY TO GET MARRIED SHE MARRIED THE ROSE GARDENER’S SON. Why did she marry him? Octavia?
octavia: Because while she was practicing at night he would watch her and make sure nobody would see.

RACHEL: So he was . . . what would you say about him?

octavia: He was nice to her.

RACHEL: He was nice to her.

*patricia*: He was like kind.

RACHEL: Kind. What else?

*patrick 1*: He was trustworthy.

RACHEL: He was trustworthy. Wow he had lots of good qualities that—Yeah.

*patrick 2*: Like he doesn’t actually hurt anyone or horses.

RACHEL: Yeah, so he was a very kind, special person. Yeah.

malcolm: Pleasant.

RACHEL: He was pleasant. Wow, that’s a great word, Malcolm!

*pat*: Nice- like helpful.
RACHEL: Helpful, yeah. Would you say that he was her friend?
All: Yeah.
RACHEL: Did he definitely show that he was her friend? Evan?
evan: {responding instead to an earlier remark about his not beating horses} ... I think he didn’t really whip on a horse like the knights.
RACHEL: So you think he kind of respected her [Violetta’s] ways of treating things? So they had that in common. Yeah, Andrew?
andrew: Maybe from her perspective he was cute.
RACHEL: From her perspective he was cute. She thought he was cute. Okay. Do you think he- he would- that was a good choice for her?
All: Yeah.

I must confess that the sheer number of astute observations and inferences the students were able to make with regard to a character who barely made an appearance in the rest of the book astounded me. In that regard, it seemed enough to recognize what the rose gardener’s son was not – what he did not represent. He was not shown to represent all the hyper-masculine bravado or animal cruelty Violetta associated with the other knights. He was also seen as trustworthy and supportive of her as a friend – one of very few characters in the book who did not try to impose his perspective or abilities on others, he looked out for her (quite literally) but never seemed to look down upon her. One boy, Andrew, volunteered that perhaps Violetta found the rose gardener’s son to be cute; seemingly an innocent remark, this reminded me that Violetta chose to be with him. If this fiercely determined, independent, and capable young woman – whom the readers do come to know in great detail throughout the narrative – chose him, perhaps that alone speaks highly enough of the rose gardener’s son. Certainly the students in each class trusted her judgment of him.

RACHEL: And the way all fairy tales end. THEY LIVED . . .
All: {Joining in, in unison} Happily ever after!
Final Thoughts and Reflections

For the purposes of introducing and illuminating each theme, thus far I have deconstructed segments of the lesson transcripts so as to present these as four distinct and decipherable themes; however, it is equally important to appreciate that the quartet of themes naturally crop up in conversation with one another, with each contextually informing and shaping the next. In fact, I frequently found it less challenging to identify data-rich excerpts that qualified as pedagogies of gendering (and, as such, warranting my concentrated analysis), than it was to simply identify these exchanges as pertaining especially to just one theme or another. Indeed, these themes frequently intersect, overlap, and weave together; they do not exist in isolation.

As such, I wonder what broader discursive patterns or principles emerge in light of and across the multiple themes. Given that I anticipate probing more deeply into these facets of my data analysis with my forthcoming work and in future projects, for now I feel prepared to speculate about two of my preliminary findings:

1) Both classes tended to generously credit protagonists who present as masculine with greater agency and skill, quickly elevating their roles and actions as being especially admirable and even heroic.

2) It seems that visual representations (e.g., illustrations of dress and physical action, particularly with regard to feminized identities,) routinely supersede other gendered readings of a text, dynamic, or character by each class.

I have found multiple instances in each classroom and throughout the entire series of read-aloud lessons to substantiate this pair of assertions... and even they intertwined at times.

With both The Princess Knight (Funke, 2004) and Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare (Polacco, 2006) – notably, these shared texts having been facilitated as read-alouds by Fern and

\[136\] Of note, the pair function somewhat in parallel to a presumed masculine/feminine binary.
Rachel – there is clear evidence of each class privileging the presumably masculine efforts and intentions of certain characters. Of the many genderizations to surface in discussions of the *Rotten Richie* text, I found it especially noteworthy that, despite the autobiographical tale’s telling coming from Tricia’s perspective – one that finds her sibling to be obnoxious, to say the least – each class proved to more readily credit and congratulate Richie than Tricia. Never was there any apparent doubt that Richie *could* become competent at dance while both classes predicted Tricia would fail – that such a task was simply beyond her capability.

RACHEL: How do you think she’s going to do?
*pat*: Terrible.
RACHEL: You think they’re both going to do really bad?
*patrick 1*: She’s going to have to put the gear on.
RACHEL: Yeah and she’s a little small.
*patricia*: And, and the hockey skates are different than a regular skate. Did you know that? They have the two skate things.
RACHEL: ... *BY THE TIME RICHIE HELPED ME OUT ON TO THE ICE WITH THE REST OF THE TEAM I COULD HARDLY STAND UP. So why was she having such a hard time standing up?*
*pat*: She’s used to other skates.
...
RACHEL: Yeah. Why else is she having a hard time Crystal?
crystal: Because the gear is so like heavy. And she never, like- And she just looked-... It *looked* easier then because they were a little bit taller, and a little bit stronger.
RACHEL: And maybe they had . . . they were used to it too.
crystal: Yeah.

Furthermore, the students predicted Tricia would face serious physical injury whereas they imagined Richie’s harshest wounds would be to his pride/ego.

FERN: (pausing to break for lunch) We need to stop right here. What do you think is going to happen? What do you think? She’s going to play in a hockey game. What do you think is going to happen to her? Any guesses? Joel?
Joel: I think... well, I believe she’s going to be paralyzed and like break every bone in her body.

Fern: So she might get hurt? Then she wouldn’t be able to do anything. Interesting... Steven?

Steven: Maybe she, maybe she’ll get hurt and her brother does the ballet for her while she’s hurt.

Fern: Oooh, interesting... And, Kami?

Kami: I think she’s gonna get run over by the Zamboni. {laughter ensues}

... *Patrick*: I think she’s going to be like break a lot of her bones and she won’t be, be going to the recital and she won’t be able to do dance and her brother will have to go on for her and he’ll be really good.

... Fern: How do you think Richie is going to do in the ballet recital? Brenda?

Brenda: He’ll probably be really good. {several neighboring students nod in agreement}

Furthermore, students attributed Tricia’s game-winning goal on the ice to a mix of circumstantial luck and situational ease, yet Richie’s momentary display of choreographed competence makes him a hero - he saves the day!

Fern: When the fight was over almost all of the Sonics except the goalie were in the penalty box. All of the Beavers were too. “You’re back in on the Ice 12, let’s go!” The ref barked as he opened the door and pushed me out. What do you think is going to happen? What do you think? Mac?

Mac: She’s going to score the winning goal.

Fern: Think she’s going to score?

Mac: She’s going to have to!

Fern: Okay, Casey.

Casey: I think she’ll score because there’s no Sonics because everybody piled on.

Fern: Yeah, there’s only the goalie and her, right?

... Fern: {discussing the dance recital finale once the story had ended} ... Why was Richie? Why did he do terribly throughout the whole thing and then at the end he all of a sudden was very good? Why? What did he learn there? Tory?

Tracy: Cause he was practicing. He had practiced that part before.

Fern: Yeah, he was practicing and practicing Paul’s part for it. So he-

Tracy: So he could help her.

Fern: Right, so he could help her. And he practiced so much that he had that part almost perfect. Becca?
becca: Since it was the really hard duet, he liked it more, so he practiced Paul’s part just in case.

With this reading of the text, Richie comes across like an archetypal boy scout, ever-prepared responsible, and ready to help any little old lady (or kid sister) across the metaphorical street. Despite his destroying every other dance number of which he was a part – even injuring one of the other dancers, Richie is constructed as having saved the day – a shining star of the recital. By contrast, each class paid far less attention to the fact that Tricia’s goal (and save, serving momentarily as her team’s de facto goalie as well) made the difference between winning and losing the match for Richie’s team.

To my surprise, with *The Princess Knight*, Violetta’s selection of the rose gardener’s son for her husband invited heaps of praise for him – a character who yields remarkably little mention throughout entire book (see Figure 5-11 for the only mention made to this character prior to the final page) – from students in each class. I was amazed to see how many reasons the students in each class provided for why he was such a good match/catch for her.

FERN: .... Why do you think she chose the rose gardener’s son? What do you think? Steven?
steven: Maybe so at the castle because he could plant a bunch of flowers.
FERN: Okay. Maybe. What do we know about the rose gardener’s son? What did he do for her? Joel?
joel: He watched over her when, when she left.
FERN: Yeah how many of you remember that? He watched over her whenever she was practicing at night by herself. He watched in the gardens over for her. Tracy?
tracy: And he didn’t tell anyone.
FERN: He didn’t tell anyone. It was a secret. ...

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RACHEL: *IF YOU MUST KNOW MANY YEARS LATER WHEN SHE WAS OLDER AND READY TO GET MARRIED SHE MARRIED THE ROSE GARDENER’S SON. WHY DID SHE MARRY HIM? Octavia?*
octavia: Because while she was practicing at night he would watch her and make sure nobody would see.

RACHEL: So he was . . . what would you say about him?

octavia: He was nice to her.

RACHEL: He was nice to her.

*patricia*: He was like kind.

RACHEL: Kind. What else?

*patrick 1*: He was trustworthy.

RACHEL: He was trustworthy. Wow he had lots of good qualities that- Yeah.

*patrick 2*: Like he doesn’t actually hurt anyone or horses.

RACHEL: Yeah, so he was a very kind, special person. Yeah.

malcolm: Pleasant.

RACHEL: He was pleasant. Wow, that’s a great word, Malcolm!

*pat*: Nice- like helpful.

RACHEL: Helpful, yeah. Would you say that he was her friend?

All: Yeah.

RACHEL: Did he definitely show that he was her friend? Evan?

evan: {responding instead to an earlier remark about his not beating horses} ... I think he didn’t really whip on a horse like the knights.

RACHEL: So you think he kind of respected her [Violetta’s] ways of treating things? So they had that in common. Yeah, Andrew?

andrew: Maybe from her perspective he was cute.

RACHEL: From her perspective he was cute. She thought he was cute. Okay. Do you think he- he would- that was a good choice for her?

All: Yeah.

Whereas Violetta’s sheroic accomplishments throughout the story seem to have earned her sufficient respect that the students would rally behind her choice for a mate, it was startling to me how many of the under-developed gaps of character development surrounding this character were discursively filled with gold as the children describe him. Just as Violetta breaks the archetypal mold for conventional princesses, it seems the rose gardener’s son is afforded all the heteronormative trappings of a handsome and noble could be prince, by association if nothing else.
Perhaps nowhere were illustrations more influential in stirring up discursive themes and steering gendered reading of a text or character than they were with *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002). Whereas Rachel’s class had trouble initially settling into a shared understanding of what was meant by the label *sissy*, once the gendered concept took root they astutely recognized a masculinized representation that challenged this. The image of Elmer rescuing his father by hoisting him atop his back rattled the very idea of what it meant for him to be a sissy... albeit temporarily.

RACHEL:  “FORGET ME AND SAVE YOURSELF. THAT’S WHAT EVERY OTHER DUCK WOULD DO.” WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH ELMER LIFTED THE HEAVY OLD DUCK AND CARRIED HIM TO THE SAFETY OF THE POND. IT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN WHAT ANY OTHER DUCK WOULD DO BUT ELMER KNEW IN HIS HEART IT WAS THE RIGHT THING FOR HIM TO DO. **So what do you think about Elmer in this picture** [(see Figure 5-3)]?

*patrick 1*: Strong.

RACHEL: Looking pretty strong there, isn’t he? Yeah!

*patricia 1*: Helpful.

RACHEL: Helpful.

*patricia 2*: I think he’s strong because all that work he done.

RACHEL: He did the work to build the house, right. Lori?

lori: Independent.

RACHEL: Independent. What a great word. What do you mean by that, Lori? That’s a great word to describe him.

lori: He doesn’t care what other people say. He can do anything he wants to do.

RACHEL: He doesn’t care what other people say and he can do what he wants to do. Blaire?

blaire: He’s caring.

RACHEL: He’s caring. ...[These are] lots of great words to describe him. Would you- would you look at the picture and call him a sissy?

All: No.

*patrick 1*: I would feel [he was] pretty brave if that was the front page.

RACHEL: *(Giggling in agreement)* Yeah, if that was the front page.
Having displayed impressive feats of both bravery and strength, the class opinion of Elmer shifted dramatically, for they had previously characterized him as weak and pitiful – anything but masculine. Ironically, the assertion that a book’s cover image stands to provide the prevailing reading of a given character may have never been more apropos considering what happened as the read-aloud neared its conclusion, when several students took notice of how Elmer looked on the book’s cover.

*patrik 1*:  
*Noticing the illustration of Elmer on the cover*  
Why is he wearing heart glasses?  
{looking from side to side, modeling a grimaced expression for his peers}

*patrik 2*:  
And look,  
{pointing and giggling}  
he has a pink backpack with flowers

RACHEL:  
{caught off-guard}  
Well, he likes to entertain- likes to be different, right?

*patria 1*:  
He looks like a girl.  
{Much of the class erupts in laughter, pointing, teasing and laughing at Elmer.}

RACHEL:  
Well he looks, maybe- But that’s okay.

*patrik 3*:  
Maybe he wanted to be a girl.  
{The class begins to become a bit unruly.}

RACHEL:  
Well, he- he likes being his own- as Andrew was saying, he likes to be unique.

It was as if one glimpse at the book’s cover undid all the ground Elmer (and sissies everywhere) had made in terms of acceptance.

Concerning overpowering words, several other scenarios come to mind as well. For instance, throughout the first half of reading *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995) in Rachel’s room, the class seemed more focused upon the clothed bodies of Asian Indian women (and Rachel herself, that day, modeling some of the cultural dress herself) than the plot of the story. Clearly preoccupied with Rachel’s exotic attire, one boy interrupted the narrative at an important part to ask her about this.

*patrik*:  
Why do you wear it  
{indicating the scarf that Rachel had informally draped like a sash from one shoulder to the opposite waist}  
like that?

RACHEL:  
Well because when I was in India the women either wore these like this and sometimes they wore them on their heads. But another way they wore them
is {modeling the adjustment of her scarf – now draped across her head} these are called dupattas. Sometimes they also wore them like this too. {adjusts the fabric to still another position about the head} Yeah, Andrew?

andrew: They only wear them like that?

RACHEL: They only wear them just over {lays the kerchief across her shoulders this time}. Yeah, the way kind of the way that Blaire’s is. [Earlier, Rachel had referenced the Hannah Montana scarf Blaire was wearing as not unlike the Indian scarf she had on.]

With Fern’s class as well, clothing steered much of their reading of *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980). Similarly to how Rachel’s class constructed Indian as if dressing up dolls, Fern’s class conceptualized princesses almost entirely by how they look and what they wore. When initially presented with a cover image (see Figure 5-7) that stood in stark contrast to the traditional princess archetype, the students suggested a number of creative plot premises that might rationalize what they saw.

FERN: Today we’re going to be reading *The Paper Bag Princess*. ... Well think about the title here and think- Let’s take a look at the picture- the illustration on the front here. What do you think this story is going to be about? What do you think? Lance?

lance: It’s going to be about a princess with and a prince and a dragon blowing down the castle.

FERN: Okay. You think a dragon is going to burn down the castle?

lance: {continuing} –and the only thing the princess can wear is a paper bag.

FERN: Okay. Andrea, what do you think?

andrea: I think it’s going to be about a princess that wears a paper bag cause it looks like the paper bag blends in with the door or something {suggesting the bag would help to camouflage her}.

FERN: Yeah, it does kind of look like that illustration there. ... Why do you think it’s going to- . . . Carla, thank you for your quietness.

carla: I think it’s a princess that only wears a paper bag. And I think the dragon is her pet and I think she only wears the paper bag around if she’s with the dragon.

FERN: Oh so her- the dragon might be her pet. Interesting. Steven, what do you think?

steven: Maybe she’s a slave of the dragon.

FERN: {nodding} And, Isaac?
isaac: Maybe the dragon wants to eat her so she wears the paper bag that does not taste good.

FERN: Maybe. Interesting...

Although Fern’s initial prompt called for general predictions with regard to the story as a whole, one inventive answer after another focused specifically upon putting forward possible circumstances that might explain/excuse Elizabeth’s state of disheveled undress. This fixation with resolving the dissonant image of an unkempt princess indeed follows the class’ reading throughout the narrative; in fact, several of the students’ comments suggest they presume Elizabeth’s efforts throughout the story to be as much motivated by clothing as by love.

FERN: He [the dragon] was easy to follow because he left a trail of burned forests and horses’ bones. What do you think she’s going to do? What do you think? Well what does it say here? Where is she going? Steven?

steven: To the dragon

FERN: To the dragon. Why is she going to the dragon?

steven: Cause she’s mad.

FERN: Okay. What else? Why else, Mac?

mac: She wants Ronald the prince back and I think and maybe because she wants her clothes back.

FERN: Okay cause she wants Ronald back and maybe to get some clothes back.

All: Yeah. [some chuckles]

... Fast forward several pages to where Elizabeth has effectively exhausted the dragon, capitalizing upon its boastful vanity to render the beast virtually powerless. Here we see a continuation of what Mac had predicted earlier; however the order of her presumed motivations seems to have switched places.

FERN: ...So the dragon jumped up and flew around the world in just 20 seconds. When he got back he was too tired to talk and he laid down and went straight to sleep. What is Elizabeth going to do? Someone who hasn’t read it. Kayla, what do you think Elizabeth is going to do?

kayla: Sneak in the castle and get her clothes and stuff... and the prince.
FERN: **Sneak in the castle, get her clothes and the prince.**

With both read-alouds, the respective classes assumed the role of *informed outsiders* – having neither been princesses nor Asian Indian – draping these female characters in precast archetypes of femininity until their roles remained (in large part) constructed/defined as much by their wardrobe as anything else.

Having now elaborated upon five of the primary codes I employed to analyze these data as well as four emergent themes and two broader patterns I have discovered therein, the questions *so what?* and *now what?* remain ever-present. In the chapter that follows I expand upon the foreseeable impact and implications of my efforts with this study.
Chapter 6

Impact, Implications, and In-Roads of/for the Study

This chapter begins by situating my study within its primary scholarly realms of classroom discourse (via read-alouds) and gender(ing). Next it moves toward the personal, acknowledging the multi-layered influences my many identities have had on (and in) the work/study itself, disclosing reconciled tensions, and making recommendations for improvements and/or new possibilities toward these scholarly ends.

Advancing Scholarly Conversations, Contributions, and Future Possibilities

Having now seen this study through to its fruition, like any researcher (I imagine), I would like to believe my work matters to others – that it meaningfully contributes to the existing literature. Stepping back from it, I see a number of ways this research leaves its mark on several fields of thought and understanding, advancing scholarly conversation within (and I believe, across) each.

Having already elaborated upon my conceptual framework in Chapter 2, feminist scholars Lissa Paul (1987, 1997, 1998) – whose theoretical criticisms alerted me to the provocative potential of gendered representations in children’s literature – and Bronwyn Davies (1989, 2003; Davies & Harré, 1990; Davies & Kasama, 2004) – whose empirical work introduced me to the notion of capturing and considering the discourses of children in groups discussing such texts on their own – each had a tremendous impact upon the way I have constructed and conducted this study. My conceptual framework (see Figure 2-3) breaks ground not only in its
relationship to the work of Paul and Davies but across both. It effectively connects the worlds of literacy theory, reader-response theory, children’s literature, and feminist critique with those of discourse, social constructivism, and post-structuralism, thus positioning my research efforts as informed by, complimentary to, and uniquely distinguishable from theirs. Situating my investigation of gendered discourses to their pedagogical employment seems a logical extension of Paul’s and Davies’ work before mine (see Figures 2-1 and 2-2 respectively), shifting the spotlight and focus toward the more naturalistic setting of elementary schools and in the context of classroom read-alouds. Beyond theorizing this collection of studies as a triangular relationship – with each leg related to the others – I believe the empirical nature of this study stands to influence and inform scholarly discussions of both classroom discourse and gender(ing).

One manner in which I believe this study propels the field of classroom discourse forward is by inviting its readers into these classrooms, so much as is possible, to see and listen for themselves. Classroom read-alouds can be especially illustrative in this regard. Not only do they provide an authentic pedagogical context for considering classroom discourse but they also tend to do so against the backdrop of a narrative skeletal structure; this, of course, serves as a convenient point of reference throughout each reading. Given that such lessons typically do not call for elaborate movement or physical activity, not only are these events that much more straightforward to capture on film/audio but they are also predictably easier to describe to others not there in person. With so many favorable aspects of read-alouds (as well as their follow-up discussions/activities) providing a particularly powerful context for researching classroom discourse, it seems a shame so few of these studies provide generous segments of actual transcript excerpts of the read-aloud discussions themselves. Instead, they commonly issue only the researchers’ interpretations of events, as summation, effectively diminishing the voice and perspective of students in their own words. Rice (2002) provides one such example, when she asserts: “The students held a traditional male-female dualistic perception, although I detected an
acceptance for girls to be ‘tomboys’” (p. 36). Rice continues, confiding that sissy characters featured had no such luck, by comparison. In this regard, where Rice’s work leaves the reader wondering how this much may have looked, sounded, and/or played out (both on the part of the students and for her as their teacher), my work does not.

Another facet of my study that advances scholarly conversations of classroom discourse is how I drew upon more than just the live video-footage of the read-alouds themselves, juxtaposing what was said and done in the moment with opportunities to revisit, reflect upon, and reinterpret these events as well. Following each read-aloud lesson, I built in opportunities for the facilitating teacher-participants (via informal reflection) and I (through my own research log/field notes) to document the sense we each made of the corresponding read-aloud lesson separately. By contrast, the culminating interview served a different purpose entirely; in preparation, I drew upon our separate observations and previous points of reflection to draft questions that stood to pull our thinking into conversation with one another. Together with each teacher, I interrogated the collective case experiences with regard to classroom discourse and gender, drawing upon observations we each arrived at having recently watched the lessons back on video. What I found to be most innovative (and organic) about the concluding interviews was the interactive nature of ongoing investigation. Not only did I invite the teacher-participants to further clarify and/or revisit their previous points of reflection, but I also surfaced some of my budding ideas and emerging observations, providing each teacher-participant a chance to speak to and/or consider those as well. These interactions took on a reciprocally pedagogical quality, with each party seizing these opportunities to workshop (and member check) initial insights and early observations at the onset of the analysis process.

Having selected gender-themed texts to invite and capture pointedly gendered discourses, I feel my work speaks as much to the curricular phenomenon of gender(ing) (as defined in Chapter 1) as it does to the pedagogical nature of classroom discourse. As such, I positioned this
study to expand the feminist literature in at least three specific ways. First, much of the existing discourse and focus surrounding feminist theory and practice presumes a taken-for-granted adult-centeredness\textsuperscript{137}; even the name “women’s studies” quite literally constructs the discussion as one centered on adult female concerns/experience, relegating children to either the margins or as accessory burdens, blessings, and/or responsibilities for mothers, women, and other adults to tend to\textsuperscript{138}. From my perspective children are not entirely without agency – they are not simply on the receiving end of a world of adult ideas and actions. Ours is not merely an adult world for future generations to someday inherit; they too move about and read the world as gendered beings from a very young age. This work makes clear how they contribute to pedagogical discussions and negotiations of gender(ing) – particularly in elementary schools where they are greater in number than the adults.

Building upon the ideas that K-12 settings may provide exciting sites for feminist praxis, I also hope my work contributes to the gradual decentering of higher education as the preeminent setting for feminist pedagogies, where much of the extant literature and discussion seems to situate itself. This work draws attention to the fact that feminist pedagogies are taken up and explored in K-12 classrooms as well – by teachers and students alike. Were more teacher education programs mindful of how feminist theory stands to inform feminist pedagogy (and vice versa), the two worlds might compatibly work together: feminist scholars inspiring elementary teachers to bring a feminist lens and reading to the texts and resources used at school and teacher practitioners demonstrating principals underlying the practice of pedagogy itself. Working together, we may actually distinguish what a feminist pedagogy might look and feel like.

\textsuperscript{137} although the emerging field of girl studies speaks in part to this it has not received the currency more commonly associated with women’s studies.

\textsuperscript{138} Here again, as I also touch upon this in Chapter 2, while I am cognizant of Girl Studies, I remain convinced that my research question(s)have yet to be explore in even that emerging area of feminist inquiry.
The third manner in which I see this study enriching discussions of gender(ing) in/among scholarly feminist circles has to do with the new and emerging awareness it affords. The informed outsider theme in particular, which I introduced and discussed in Chapter 5, is particularly worthy of note in this regard; I have yet to see any comparable scholarship in the extant literature that so convincingly recognizes the gendered observations and understandings children come to make about adult relationships, be they parental, marital, or with regard to courting.

Given all the inspiration I have drawn from this study – from the teachers, the texts, and the students involved, too – I can imagine taking this study in a number of directions. Aside from exploring how I might differently involve students in the data collection process (an idea I take up below), one option is to recreate this study (or at least something very similar to it), changing only the demographic contexts. For example, I might explore similar sites but with different age/grade levels; establish new sites entirely for a comparative study in an all-boys or an all-girls school; or inquire about male classroom teachers, inner-city/urban schools, or even schools abroad\(^\text{139}\). Theoretically, I would like to pay greater attention to matters of race, class, religion, sexuality, and body image, as well. I also see great potential for moving beyond the situatedness of read-alouds to other parts of the school day (e.g., social studies discussions of history and current events, physical education class, or recess time).

Beyond where my specific research interests draw me, I hope others might move this work forward as well. Classroom teachers come to mind first. Provided they find my study accessible and applicable\(^\text{140}\), where might they take this work? One could work collaboratively with school librarians to identify gender-themed texts appropriate to each curricular unit,

\(^{139}\) Davies, for instance, reproduced her initial Frogs and snails and feminist tales study (1989) years later with a colleague in Japan (Davies & Kasama, 2004) to see if/how the East/West divide might contribute to different attitudes or ideas about gender.

\(^{140}\) and I hope they do, as they have always been a part of the scholarly reading audience I have kept in mind
designing special lessons plans for each. Like Rice (2002), another may wish to move beyond the context of situated read-alouds, exploring new ways to extend and revisit gender-themed works of children’s literature through dynamic pedagogical activities rooted in transmediation.

I can imagine still more directions for researchers and scholars to pursue. For instance, were Lissa Paul to read my study I expect she might focus on the six separate texts the teachers read\textsuperscript{141}, conceptualizing the gendered messages she finds available in these books (and, as she might say, “that the books find in her as well”). I would encourage her to move beyond the written text alone, though, and to consider the read-alouds themselves as she \textit{reads otherways} (Paul, 1998); I have no doubt her interpretations would illuminate readings I have yet to see or consider. Should Bronwyn Davies learn of my research, I imagine she might reimagine the study (or something along its lines), arranging for smaller groupings of students (e.g., no more than four or five at a time) situated perhaps in functional reading groups – a more naturalistic middle ground of sorts between her \textit{frogs and snails and feminist tales} work (1989; Davies & Kasama, 2004) and my own. Doing so would allow her to explore the specific nature of interacting student positions and personalities\textsuperscript{142} and their distinguishable attitudes/beliefs about gender as evidenced discursively, as well as in relation to the presence of a teacher in the mix.

[More than just drawing ideas and readings from the actual data or methods my research here offers, I do believe both Paul’s and Davies’ work also stands to be informed and enriched by certain aspects of my findings. Given that Paul tends to take a very ‘adult’ reading of the world of children’s literature – a venue primarily intended for children and those who might read it to/with them (in mind) - I think her work stands to gain much from considering how children read seemingly adult world form their own youthful perspective. My \textit{informed outsiders} theme and

\textsuperscript{141}Rest assured, she would have a field day with \textit{The Boy of the Three-Nap} (1995).

\textsuperscript{142}something I feel I was less able to effectively capture or analyze with entire classes of 20 or more students to consider at any given time.
analysis points to this in particular. This same theme speaks especially to (although others do as well) how Davies might extend her own thinking with regard to the performance of metacommentary as something a teacher projects upon his/her reading of a text. Although I can appreciate Davies’ wish to control for this in her empirical work – and I touch upon this much in Chapter 2 - my research reconceptualizes such metacommentary as bidirectional and indeed pedagogical. In some ways, Davies’ decision to minimize the role of adult influence on the children’s readings of a text – a notion admirably intended to better capture what the children themselves have to say - ironically also has the effect of robbing them of their agency to influence and or challenge the adults in a classroom context. Indeed, those listening for it know that students employ a variety of pedagogies in schools as they teach teachers (as well as one another and themselves) a great deal about how they understand their world.

How might a(nother) women’s studies scholar\textsuperscript{143} take up this work differently? I expect some feminist theorists would take special interest in one or more of the emergent themes I identified, especially “binary conventions” and “feminized identities.” Moreover a queer theorist might advocate for moving beyond even \textit{The Sissy Duckling} (Fierstein, 2002) to incorporate more children’s texts that are undeniably LGBT/Q-themed (or otherwise destabilize gender binaries and hegemonies of heteronormativity), following up specifically upon how teachers feel about possibly reading these aloud with/to their students. I do not expect these scholars would press for the read-alouds to necessarily happen, particularly if the teacher-participants voiced discomfort with doing so; instead, they could focus on the rationalization(s) teachers provide for their unease with such texts.

\textsuperscript{143} Given the reality of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship, this term, of course, is neither a static nor mutually exclusive category.
I afford an important caveat to all of these potential projects, however: my own work with this study has inevitably been informed and influenced by who I am and how I have moved about in this world.

Situating Myself Within the Work

Leaving my school and classroom, my coworkers and elementary students, my paycheck and classroom teacher identity, in 2004 I enrolled full-time in a doctoral program hours away from all I knew, bidding adieu to what had been the most important chapter of my professional life yet. Transitioning to the world of doctoral studies and academia made for a rather bumpy landing initially, but I came to appreciate my graduate assistantship responsibilities in the POPU-RASD elementary PDS, where my work with kids, colleagues, and school communities could continue – all of which felt both familiar\textsuperscript{144} and gratifying to me.

Working within this PDS also afforded me the ripest of contexts I could ask for in terms of integrating much of what I had been reading about and discussing in my coursework (anyway) with the day-to-day work of teaching, learning, and supervision in school settings. This much seemed a natural fit – wedding educational theory with its practice; still, I was equally impressed to find many of the topics featured in my women’s studies classes applicable to this context as well. Herein my attention toward what I have come to call “gendering” was born (see gendering defined in Chapter 1).

Indeed, the cumulative and overlapping spheres of thought I had been grappling with cognitively as a student – e.g., curriculum and instruction, educational leadership and supervision, \textsuperscript{144} Whereas I promptly took notice of differences too, between RASD and the districts I had worked in or attended, such discrepancies seemed minor by comparison with the overall fluency and consistency of what it means to work in elementary school settings. While educators at Roosevelt proved to operate within a dialect all their own - somewhat new and unusual to me – it was immediately clear to me we were already functioning within a common, base language (and that I would, with time, learn to appreciate and exercise its subtleties).
language and literacy, women’s and gender studies, queer theory, feminist theory, feminist research and pedagogies – informed the developing lenses I brought with me into the schools each day as an instructor and supervisor. As such, I came to see the work of elementary teachers and students with fresh eyes – to experience an all too familiar dynamic with new and heightened senses. This, in turn, changed the way I conceptualized much of what I noticed, said, and thought, as well as how I responded. Wrapped up in the infectious spirit of inquiry this PDS prided itself upon, I found myself drawn to exploring and investigating school spaces from perspectives I had never previously considered, with new concerns in mind and questions to ask.

The POPU-RASD elementary PDS proved to be an environment conducive to my considering a number of budding ideas and questions as I conducted pilot studies throughout each of the four years I worked within it. A testament to the notion that true Professional Development Schools inevitably provide plentiful opportunities for continuous growth to any and all (interested) parties associated with them, by the end of my second year I found inspiration in the research work several of my PDS colleagues were conducting at the time. These cutting-edge educators were exploring the potential of Studiocode software as a means for more meaningful self-reflection among teachers who wished to better understand (and consequently, improve upon) the way they facilitated “science talks” with their elementary students. By videotaping these discussion-based lessons, then loading the digital footage into Studiocode via their laptop computers, the teacher-researchers were able to more nimbly consider and dissect the kinds of talk they found to be most (and least) effective in inspiring students to arrive at their own “light bulb” moments of scientific discovery and understanding. Although my research interests were

145 I also found myself reflecting upon my prior practice as a classroom teacher and seeing that, too, anew.
146 not just, for instance, the preservice teachers or k-12 students themselves
147 These teachers also focused upon the language students used to express their varying levels of understanding as well as to inspire one another to build upon developing ideas.
never focused on subject-based pedagogies like science, I was fascinated by the medium of class discussions and saw great potential in the role a sophisticated video data analysis software package like Studiocode might offer. By that school year’s end I had collected video-based data of teachers in action for an entirely new pilot – the first in what would become a series of successively evolving studies using Studiocode.

As my research focus matured and my familiarity with both the technologies and scholarship relevant to such work broadened, so too did the pilots (Reilly, 2007b) I conducted show growth over time. They reflected my increasing fascination with the curricular and pedagogical messages (hidden, subtle, or otherwise present) of gendering in schools – particularly those made available via teachers, texts, and/or classroom talk. Having familiarized myself with the literature—most notably the work of Lissa Paul and Bronwyn Davies—and having access to elementary classroom settings through my own work in the POPU-RASD PDS, made this project possible. [Note: Given that read-alouds occur routinely in most RASD classrooms at the elementary level, my PDS connections throughout the district made collecting data there a convenient and informed decision for me to make.]

Having clarified my research question and design as both unique and informed, it seems important to acknowledge how my position – indeed my multiple identities – colored and shaped the lens I bring to this research project. Throughout much of this dissertation I have presented myself as an experienced elementary teacher, a doctoral candidate, a supervisor, and a methods course instructor; each of these professional roles, I believe, adequately served to situate me as having an informed appreciation for the task at hand, having conducted, observed, and supervised countless classroom read-alouds myself over the years. Still, I would be remiss (and I believe ethically irresponsible) were I to neglect to concede that I maintain strong personal opinions about these matters. Both as a self-identified queer feminist and a doting uncle (with many nieces and nephews for whom I want every possibility extended and right afforded), I take serious issue
with any curriculum (formal or otherwise) that casually reproduces conventional gender norms and expectations without also problematizing them as such. I equate classroom actions (as well as *inactions*) that indoctrinate children with hegemonized notions of gender inequity to pedagogically clipping their gendered wings.

Rather than constructing my concerns only as partisan criticism, I feel it important to also recognize my enthusiastic endorsement of those pedagogical acts of gendering made by teachers (and, at times, students) to deliberately empower all students – so that they, like X (Gould, 1972) before them (see Chapter 1), might see the world as theirs to consider without imposing gendered guardrails. I make no apologies for my stance on this matter. However, I did make certain strategic concessions as a researcher for this study in an effort to prevent my personal concerns (particularly those of frustration or disappointment) from influencing or affecting the participants involved, lest they feel unduly judged. The purpose of this study, after all, was not to stand in judgment over a personally established/perceived right and wrong way to conduct such pedagogical interactions, but to better understand the dynamics of these events.

I characterize my research approach to this study (and what I hope will follow with future studies) as being feminist, pedagogical, and activist by intention. To be clear, I have proceeded in the way conventional educational researchers might [collecting their data in analytical silence before retreating from the field, only to draw conclusions based upon their own, unchallenged/untroubled perception of what has occurred], fearing that to leave any fingerprints on the scene would be a mistake – that to engage participants directly in budding thoughts and curiosities as they emerged would *contaminate* the data. To me, it has always seemed disingenuous to conceptualize schools as sterile sites [*no offense intended to custodial workers*]; to do so, in particular, when seeking to better understand the sorts of dynamics that are of most interest to me as a researcher and educator, seems especially counterproductive.
In short, I remained open to participating in genuine pedagogical interactions throughout this research. I draw not only from the read-alouds the teachers conducted with their students – for those I made every effort to simply record and observe as a fly on the wall – but also from the formal and informal exchanges I had with teacher-participants as we collectively made sense of those events. In addition to conducting a concluding interview with each participant (where I followed up on certain observations they or I made), I took part in brief conversations with each teacher-participant throughout the weeks covered in this study. Whether these took place as exchanges in hallways, asides just before or after a specific lesson, or as unintended tangents whenever we would connect with one another about the next scheduled lesson to record, in every case (which I carefully noted) our familiar collegial rapport revealed perspectives I might otherwise have missed. With the follow-up interviews this continued as well, but I also found space during these formal, concluding exchanges to introduce some of my own nascent observations and points of interest, inviting them to join me as I worked through, rethought, troubled, and/or discarded some of these ideas. Philosophically, I was determined not to simply prey upon these teachers and their efforts as data-harvesting opportunities, neglecting their potential to play a role in the analysis process. I understand that their ‘take’ on all of this was/is of much value to me because our positions situate us to see things differently. Because of who I am, I wanted to capture these differences in my work.

**Tensions to Acknowledge and Reconcile**

While the identities I hold, the relationships I have made, and the research approaches I take have collectively afforded me certain points of entry into the RASD community and access to the participants as colleagues, still I found myself keenly aware of some (seemingly
unavoidable) tensions regarding certain boundaries to maintain, breach, and/or blur throughout
the study.

“I am not here to teacher-bash...”

Whereas the graduate school experience (and much of academia in general) is known to
esteem the role of critique [*wait for it, here comes a critique of criticism*], when it comes to
teacher supervision (Nolan & Hoover, 2004), perceived critique (evaluation and judgment) may
close as many doors as it stand to open – and depending upon one’s intentions, perhaps more.

Although I do not equate my role as a researcher with that of a supervisor, I believe my
experience with and understanding of educational supervision markedly informed my data
collection and analysis efforts with this study. I ended Chapter 2, stating:

I situate my investigative position not from the armchair of a critic, but from
the faculty lounge of my practitioner comrades whose investigation intends to learn as
much from as it hopes to inform practice.

To be clear, I think very highly of both Fern and Rachel as teachers, colleagues, and individuals. I
also feel I have an appreciation for both the complexities of pedagogical discourse as well the
pervasiveness of gendering (intentional and otherwise). Although matters of equity and social
justice have always been of great interest to me and of marked influence in my teaching, I
honestly did not have what I feel to be an accurate or unbiased recollection of how pedagogical
discourses of gender(ing) precisely occurred in my own classroom.

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148 According to Nolan & Hoover (2004), the purposes of teacher supervision and evaluation are indeed
separate, and not always compatible. Whereas evaluation has its merits, establishing and enforcing
standards of quality-control within the profession (e.g., interpreting criteria for who earns certification or
reaches tenure), supervision intends to direct its efforts toward professional development. For instance,
teachers who feel their efforts are subject to my scrutiny and judgment are (at some level) likely to feel on
 guard around me, confining our relationship to that of a critic and the critiqued, not as trusted colleagues
trying to further our own (and one another’s) professional development.
Midway through the data collection process it occurred to me how much time had passed since my last “at-bat,” facilitating a classroom read-aloud of my own. In an attempt to revisit this dynamic from within rather than merely as an observer, I volunteered to be a guest reader in a second grade classroom at Kennedy Elementary, asking the host teacher (Cameron) to videotape the lesson for me (for my own personal growth and reflection). Although I speak to this experience in greater detail later in this chapter, I believe this decision to re-familiarize myself with how it feels to conduct a read-aloud live and in the moment demonstrates my commitment to appreciating the perspectives and circumstances of my teacher-participants. I am reminded of an important declaration I made at the study’s onset: I am not here to teacher-bash. Indeed, succumbing to the lure of detached critique could be all too easy for any researcher, yet doing so (and perhaps this is especially true with regard to the field of education) advances little.

Reconciling “missed opportunities”

Perhaps it is because I identify as much as a teacher as I do a researcher that I find it so challenging to observe a lesson without imagining how I might have facilitated the session differently. It need not be about my approach being necessarily better than another so much as it is a testament to what speaks to me in the topic, text, or talk. Having said all that, it is difficult for my teaching identity and philosophy to not (on some level) favor certain strategies and approaches above others. How could I (or any caring teacher) not? After all, my experience as a student suggests there are certain pedagogical approaches I find more engaging than others. Speaking as a teacher, I take note of those strategies my students respond best to as well. These separate pieces of information certainly influence many of the planning decisions I make when approaching any given course, unit, or lesson. However, it would be short-sighted and
presumptuous of me to too quickly generalize that what seems most effective for me as a teacher and learner would hold true for all classrooms, all teachers, or all students.

I did not go into teacher-education for narcissistic or reproductive purposes. I harbor no conscious fantasies of cloning myself as a teacher and mass-producing more of me to populate each elementary classroom. Of course, I wish to have some influence on the next generation of teachers, but I want them to find their own voices and styles – to make and learn from their own mistakes. The practice of education stands to gain from its diversity of perspectives, experiences, and offerings; if teaching is indeed a craft, and I believe it is, there is something to be said for students experiencing a range of pedagogical styles and methods over the course of one’s K-12 education. Just as I, as a teacher-educator, am not looking to find mirrors each time I gaze through a classroom doorway, this much is equally true of my stance as a researcher. Progressive curricula and innovative pedagogies are hardly the result of factory-line production. Said another way, if all teachers taught the same way, we would never be able to recognize progressive work. Having made a case for appreciating diverse and unique approaches to teaching, I am not (nor should I be) of the belief that all pedagogies are of equal quality or value; to say otherwise would oversimplify the craft of teaching.

Simply put, I contend that some pedagogical decisions are more responsible than others. For instance, I expect educators to take offensive language and imagery seriously; it seems only conscientious for teachers to keep a watchful eye and ear for such matters, addressing them as they arise. However, what one professional interprets as “offensive language and imagery” (e.g., curse words and pornography – most K-12 teachers would not debate these) may not reflect what the next has in mind (e.g., inflammatory hate speech and haunting illustrations of the holocaust or lynchings or Abu Ghraib), or still the next (e.g., female characters constructed as less than their
male counterparts – without names, voices, or opinions to speak of\(^{149}\). The foreseeable continuum of depictions one might deem problematic or disturbing is rather broad and people are aware of, concerned with, and alert to this continuum differently, to be sure. As such, it stands to reason that a significant percentage of representations acknowledged as potentially offensive pass unaddressed by teachers; even those educators who acknowledge such representations as problematic do so with varying degrees of concern or conviction. As such, it seems only reasonable to imagine that how these representations are troubled – that is, if they are addressed at all – seems unpredictable at best.

To be fair, pedagogical events I conceptualize as “teachable moments” may have any number of interpretations among my fellow educators – leading to instructional responses that differ from my own. One commonly occurring scenario (and for good reason, it seems) is to succinctly acknowledge the problematic representation as such, doing so in a hurried fashion – not affording the matter more time than here and now. Of note, – and this much context may be lost on researchers who drop into classrooms briefly, collect their data, and retreat, presuming too soon to fully appreciate and understand what happened – educators may consciously choose not to problematize certain events or utterances when they first arise. Classroom teachers who spend the bulk of nearly 180 full days with these children may trust that opportunities will later arise to address such issues\(^{150}\). An example from Rachel’s classroom comes immediately to mind.

Prior to beginning the book, *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995), the following exchange took place. I reference this exchange in Chapter 5 as well:

*patricia 1*:  **I think maybe, like in India, I heard all the girls get their ears pierced.**

\(^{149}\) hegemonized stereotypes and condescending caricatures of Japanese women

\(^{150}\) Selfishly, my research may have benefitted had I always been there (batteries charged and lens in focus) to capture the data each time teachers dealt with such matters directly, but those plainly were not the conditions of this study.
RACHEL: And the girls get their ears pierced. That’s a really good thing. [presumably meaning that this was a good observation of cultural norms and practices, not necessarily a good policy, per say] I think a lot of the women do.

*patricia 1*: There’s a state that I think you have to get them pierced in.

RACHEL: In one of the states? You heard that? Okay.

*patricia 1*: I think it’s Cuba – yeah, Cuba!

RACHEL: So Cuba is a whole different place from India. Okay? But that’s- We’ll talk about that more. A whole different place. Right, yeah-

*patricia 2*: I figured out yesterday that if I lived in China my sister and I would be on the streets.

RACHEL: Okay? {her eyes going wide, seemingly caught off guard by this last remark, Rachel pauses to gather her thoughts before continuing} We can talk more about that- Okay, when- when we do that. Right now, let’s try to focus a little bit on what’s going on here. I know you have lots of ideas about the different countries. It’s good to do that.

It seems Rachel had prioritized cultural observations above accuracy early on in this exchange, not concerned with exploring the initial claim regarding earrings in India. However, as the first girl [*Patricia 1*] elaborates upon her initial observation, it becomes increasingly clear she has some misunderstandings with regard to simple geography. Noting this as such, Rachel quickly corrects the girl, promising to return to this matter at another time when she can better illustrate the geographic distance between India and Cuba (as well as that the two are not interchangeable). When a second girl [*Patricia 2*] made what I read as a disparaging generalization about the conditions of life in China¹⁵¹ Rachel’s shocked facial expression was evidence enough that she too interpreted this as a the transgression. However, feeling rushed for time at having not yet begun the text 20 minutes into the read-aloud, she pressed onward with the lesson, planning

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¹⁵¹ I characterize the remark about China as cavalier – not simply a matter of confused names for places on a map, – reminiscent of the “ugly American” archetype. Certainly different interpretations exist – e.g., that this indeed reflected thoughtful consideration of economic issues and comparative cultural circumstances (perhaps, with a parent/guardian providing additional insight into the family’s socio-economic status). However, given the trivializing tone and flippant delivery I read as being attached to this remark (which, admittedly, is difficult to capture in writing, despite its seemingly palpable presence in the footage itself), I am hesitant to attribute this closed-off remark as being more pensive than it seems to have been.
instead to address this misunderstanding at a later time. In her initial reflection that followed this lesson Rachel made no mention of this event; however, during my next visit to Rachel’s classroom she pulled me aside briefly to offer an update: “Don’t worry, the other day I got back to the comment about how bad it is to live in China. Yikes!”

Indeed, shelving a concern temporarily to revisit it at a later time is one understandable pedagogical response; still another would be to grant that something questionable occurred but not to see the matter as worthy of further comment. One such example of making a conscious choice not to seize these “teachable moments” can be found in Fern’s classroom. With Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare, many of Fern’s students had little hope that Tricia would succeed in the hockey game; more often than not, in fact, predictions pointed to her getting seriously injured.

FERN: ... We need to stop right here. What do you think is going to happen? What do you think? She’s going to play in a hockey game. What do you think is going to happen to her? Any guesses? Joel?

joel: I... think... well, I believe she’s going to be paralyzed and like break every bone in her body.

FERN: So she might get hurt? Then she wouldn’t be able to do anything. Interesting... Steven?

steven: Maybe she, maybe she’ll get hurt and her brother does the ballet for her while she’s hurt.

FERN: Oooh, interesting... And, Kami?

kami: I think she’s gonna get run over by the Zamboni. {laughter ensues}

In our concluding interview, Fern acknowledged having noticed that students had much higher expectations for Richie’s prospects in the world of dance than for his sister’s in ice hockey. I asked Fern if she had thought to point this observation out to her students or encourage them to elaborate on it. Fern remarked that she had considered this at one point, but opted not to because the discrepancy was “not a big deal” in her eyes.
Unlike the previous examples, both of which assume the teacher indeed recognizes a problematic representation of one kind or another, Fern’s facilitation of *The Boy of the Three Year Nap* (Snyder, 1995) as a read-aloud with her class was something else entirely. While I found the book’s narrative to be rather engaging, particularly with regard to its relevance in the Japan/Asia unit at the time, I was struck speechless by the text’s condescending representations of women, both in language and imagery. Among my concerns was the fact that the story’s female characters all went unnamed and were described only in reference to their relations to men (e.g., the widow, the merchant’s daughter). Moreover, the male protagonist’s love interest (“the merchant’s daughter”) is thrust into an arranged marriage with Taro where it seems every other character has an opinion of some value except her (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, the story’s female protagonist (“the widow”) is repeatedly described in comparison to a cormorant throughout the book. For those unfamiliar with what a cormorant is, Fern elaborates:

FERN: ... It’s a type of bird that Japanese fishermen would use to catch their fish. And this bird, this cormorant would catch the fish with its mouth and the fishermen hold the neck of the bird so that it does- {As Fern mimes a strangling/throttling motion, many of the children gasp in shock.} ... not to hurt it but so that the bird doesn’t swallow the fish. And then that’s how the fishermen get their fish. The bird will then spit out the fish and then the cormorant, the bird, would keep catching the fish. Okay.

Troubling neither the lack of voice/choice afforded to one character with regard to naming a spouse, nor the recurring comparisons between a mother figure’s behaviors and an animal routinely throttled senselessly for the profit of fishermen was deeply troubling to me.

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152 To be fair, I recognize that *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*’s discursive transgressions are admittedly less pronounced than any of the other examples I have provided thus far in this chapter. Furthermore, I can freely admit that, prior to taking Women’s Studies courses myself, such a feminist critique of the text would have been lost on me – particularly during my years as a busy elementary classroom teacher. I would surely have had no point of reference in terms of critically analyzing a children’s text for latent messages of sexism and gender imbalances. I suspect many classroom teachers would feel similarly.
Choosing my questions carefully\(^\text{153}\) in Fern’s follow-up interview, I asked whether she might offer any food for thought in regard to the contrasting responses her students afforded to Princess Violettea in *The Princess Knight* (Funke, 2004) and the merchant’s daughter in *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* (Snyder, 1995), given that each was confronted with the prospect of an arranged marriage. Fern indicated that she had not previously named, even to herself, Taro’s marriage to the merchant’s daughter as an “arranged marriage;” however, she easily conceded to that comparison without hesitation:

FERN: You know, I guess it is! I wonder why I have never thought of it that way before... Maybe because [the narrative is such that] you are sort of rooting for Taro’s crazy plan to work, that you can easily miss how that plan not only affects the merchant financially, but also the merchant’s daughter even more directly and personally.

Making every effort to afford Fern the benefit of the doubt with regard to unexplained discrepancies, I offered a possible explanation that could have accounted for the children’s seemingly unmoved reaction to the practice of an arranged marriage. Perhaps, I suggested, her class had already talked about the concept of arranged marriages at length in an earlier lesson, discussing the practice as an unusual (by most contemporary Western standards) custom, yet an accepted aspect of life for many Japanese people in ancient times. If that were indeed the case, I continued, I would not have expected these Western students to express shock or surprise at a cultural practice they had already explored. Fern explained that the class and she had had no such discussion but thanked me for the idea, noting that she might highlight this facet differently the next time she reads this story to/with a new group of students.

The three examples I provide above were selected because they most clearly serve to illustrate a broad range of potentially offensive representations and their respective pedagogical responses. I do not mean to suggest that these are the only such examples, nor that these scenarios

\(^{153}\) After all, I did not want to come across as though I was pointing out Fern’s mistake, questioning her pedagogical choices directly. It seemed wiser to focus upon being surprised by how the students reacted.
are entirely indicative of one teacher being markedly more proactive than the other about addressing teachable moments as they arise. In short, these examples represent my discourse-grounded explanation of “missed opportunities,” not my concerns with a teacher’s performance, per se. Additionally, it is undeniably important to acknowledge that I also observed countless teachable moments these teachers effectively seized in their respective classrooms – where teachers made the most of opportunities, at times in ways that exceeded my expectations.

Stopping short (I hope) of perpetuating the important work of teachers as taken-for-granted, I do not foreground such “taken opportunities” in the context of this section, as they offer no discord I need reconcile. Were these two not such effective elementary educators I held in high regard, their participation in my study would have served markedly different (and less useful) purposes.

**Reconciling apparent contradictions between words and actions**

Having illustrated (from my data) ways in which both of these strong, creative, caring, and reflective teachers “missed opportunities” to take up and trouble problematic representations of gender during these read-alouds, I turn my attention next to how these participants prove likewise to be contradictory at times. The fact that I notice apparent discrepancies between both Rachel’s and Fern’s respective words (expressed to me) and actions (demonstrated in practice) serves not as an invitation for personal attack. Instead, these inconsistencies provide but a necessary point of entry for further investigation of gendered discourse.

The concluding interviews I conducted with each participant served as the most appropriate time and place for me to share and examine discrepancies I noticed; as such, I made every effort to broach potentially slippery subjects with tact and consideration, scripting each of my questions ahead of time [see Appendix F]. One line of questioning I took up with each
participant was especially useful in this regard, surfacing comments that stood in juxtaposition to what I had observed in action.

COLE: At different times throughout the series of books, I notice (and you mentioned this as well in your reflections) you often select certain words or terms to highlight as vocabulary. When you do so, what tends to inspire this focus? How much of this is planned versus impromptu? How often do you find yourself doing this instead with general concepts, rather than words, where you expect something is familiar to most of the students but are curious with regard to how they have come to make sense of it? Can you provide any such examples?

Neither Fern nor Rachel had any trouble providing clear connections between individual vocabulary terms and unit-related curricula or basic literacy skills (e.g., context clues, word-attack skills, schemata). However, both teachers were slow to respond in regard to my question about discussing general concepts in class that were presumably familiar to many of their students. In fact, both participants asked me to provide examples of what I might mean by concepts and meaning so I shared the same (pre-planned) prompt with each:

COLE: We can generally assume that most of your third-graders are familiar with the terms marriage, family, and parent – if they don’t reflect their home lives they certainly appear in most children’s stories. Rather than asking individual students to provide a succinct phrase or sentence that defines any of these ... this discussion might go quite differently were we to ask them to discuss as a class what these terms mean in a broader sense. What does it mean, for instance, to be a part of a family? What does it mean to be a parent or guardian? To be married? What do any of those concepts really entail? [Etc.] (Having now provided several example scenarios, returns to the question at hand for the participant to answer, as well as some conditional follow-up prompts) How often is it that you open up concepts like these for discussion with our classes? If this is not common practice for you, why might that be? Were there any topics that surfaced (or nearly surfaced) in these read-alouds where you personally hoped the discussion might go considerably further, but you decided not to pursue that (for reasons other than time)?

Both Rachel and Fern replied that they generally did not facilitate discussion or prompts of this sort, and each provided a similar justification for why she had not pursued a given topic of conversation further with her students:
FERN: We really don’t do that sort of thing here are Jefferson; it’d be frowned upon. Our third-grade curriculum is very full, as it is, and so it’s very important that we not waste... Some families here are pretty traditional so they might not appreciate a young teacher like me trying to shape the beliefs and values of their children. ... I guess I was pretty interested in much of what they had to say about marriage. I would have loved to follow up on some of those things. And, I mean, you have to wonder where they get some of these ideas about how relationships work – I guess, how they can or how they should work. But there again, I didn’t want to seem like someone who goes nosing around in their family business. I imagine some families are more private – they might not like everything discussed at school.

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RACHEL: I’m hesitant to do things like that; I just know this curriculum so well by now and I love how it already affords us to do so many great things with neat activities and cool experiments and... There’s not much time for teachers to have those kinds of- what do you call them? I guess, ‘concept discussions,’ -unless its in science or something where I’m asking the kids to tell me all they know about magnetism or flight at the beginning of a unit. They already know a bit about those concepts... I guess I think teachers have to watch they not overstep their bounds; I had a student teacher a while back who I had to reel in a few times about that... If we want to work with these families, and, you know, it’s important to do that- If we want them to work with us, they have to trust we don’t have our own agendas we’re pushing-... I guess I really don’t see it as our place, as teachers, to teach concepts beyond what is in our curriculum. Especially not when there are religious implications. ... I wish we had had more time to talk about The Sissy Duckling and, you know, how a boy like Elmer gets treated so-

{Rachel’s cell phone rings and she apologetically takes the call before returning to the interview. She never picked up exactly where she left off here but several of the later questions allow her to revisit The Sissy Duckling.}

In each case, the subject matter was inherently gendered, and while both teacher-participants privately expressed a desire to broach the discussion more thoroughly, neither felt as though she could. Like me, Fern found her students’ general remarks about marriage fascinating, confiding she would have liked to follow up on these more directly to better understand and/or challenge her students’ thinking about why we do or do not marry people.

The reasons both Fern and Rachel provide for exercising restraint were essentially quite consistent: We see our roles as teachers confined primarily to facilitating the district’s formal
curriculum and state/national standards – not teaching broader concepts or values of our own choosing or agenda. In other words, neither a teacher’s chair, nor chalkboard, nor lectern should stand in as his/her bully pulpit. Although I can and do appreciate any call for a separation of church and state – a knee-jerk reaction that finds its way into most any educational argument – I also see the argument as both a stretch and, moreover, a cop-out. Surely, not every “touchy” topic of discussion can be equated justifiably with the likes of religious indoctrination; if it were, why would so many people choose to become public school teachers?

Beyond concerns of indoctrination lies yet another invisible elephant in the room: public school teachers indeed exercise selective censorship as a means of self-protection, job security, and reputation insurance (CYOA). I remember all too well how worrisome it can be for seemingly innocent lessons to veer dangerously close to topics that some families are likely to take issue with. Having said all that, something does not sit right with me when educators – and to be certain, here I am not referring specifically to Rachel or Fern, but to educators in general who – sincerely¹⁵⁴ proclaim we do not also teach values. By my estimate, part of what makes education such an exciting profession is that it is inherently organic, and that so much of our professional lives draw upon our personal values and interests.

As it happens, I captured a number of examples where each participant showed no signs of hesitation, taking certain liberties to discuss tangential topics and concepts of their choosing. The most pronounced of these examples occurred in Rachel’s room¹⁵⁵. Not only did Rachel devote instructional time to clarifying what it meant to be a tree hugger (beyond the literal

¹⁵⁴ I wish to allow for the possibility that these teachers may indeed genuinely mean what they say; they just might appreciate such dynamics and discourse differently than I do. This much hardly makes them liars (nor does it make me right); still I feel compelled to acknowledge this as an incongruity I have yet to fully explore or understand.

¹⁵⁵ I think it is fair to say that Rachel’s style of teaching lends itself to the contradictions being more noteworthy. As a new teacher, still familiarizing herself with the curriculum and not yet tenured, Fern generally took fewer risks in terms of veering away from matters of the district’s curriculum. She also allots significantly less time to each read-aloud lesson she teaches, affording herself fewer opportunities to take the kinds of liberties Rachel regularly takes with expansive follow-up activities, etc.
definition), but she also encouraged her students to embrace their identities as tree huggers, writing and taking a class pledge of allegiance to the movement. It speaks to the local Kennedy community (as well as, perhaps, to the year 2008 and the state of environmental affairs) that a teacher could facilitate such activities with so much unabashed eco-enthusiasm and so little concern for political ramifications; by contrast, in many areas it is still controversial to use Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax* (Geisel, 1971) for a read-aloud. Were Rush Limbaugh’s (hypothetical) daughter\textsuperscript{156} or Ted Nugent’s son in Rachel’s class, their parents certainly might take issue with a lesson encouraging their children to become tree huggers! I highlight Rachel’s tree hugging lesson not because I disapprove; in fact, I find many of her tree hugger activities both innovative and inspiring. However, I believe much of what she said and did in that lesson contradicts how Rachel positioned herself in parts of her interview.

To go one step further, I see Rachel’s green lesson on the tree hugger movement as standing in stark contrast to her decision not to entertain what might have been a comparatively rainbow-colored discussion of *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002). As her written reflection attests, it is not that classroom teachers are unable to facilitate discussions around any number of topics tangential to the formal curriculum, but rather what topics those are that matter differently:

... [*The Sissy Duckling*] was written to help students understand the idea of gender differences which I think we addressed in general but also to help students be comfortable or at least try to see someone who is gay from a different lens\textsuperscript{157}. I choose not to specifically bring up the idea of what it means to be gay.

I wonder if I should have sought a way to introduce the idea?

Is this a good age to begin to talk with students about sexual preferences? Would their families be upset by the discussion? I’m aware that in reading these books I choose to

\textsuperscript{156} To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Limbaugh has no known children.

\textsuperscript{157} It is important to acknowledge that his last point presumes that children’s initial or default stance toward gay people will be negative.
stay with more general ideas\(^{158}\) like stereotypes and acceptance of difference without trying to push the students too much regarding acceptance of specific groups of people. The students usually said things like ‘we need to look more on the outside than the inside,’ ‘we're all special in different ways,’ and ‘people can change their opinions about someone.’ This notion that change is possible seems like an important idea for them to grasp and acknowledge because without that understanding of the possibility of change, social change won’t really occur.

Following up on Rachel’s written reflection, I asked her to clarify and expand upon a number of points when I interviewed her. For instance, it was not until we spoke face-to-face that I knew, with certainty, that she interprets the Elmer character as being gay\(^{159}\). Appreciating this now and how it stood to color her performance, the book’s message (which, as she describes it, seems to be that of tolerateing gay people – or gay ducklings, at the very least), and her preparation for such a read-aloud, provides valuable insight and perspective to this lesson.

Given that Rachel professed to be uncertain still (in her written reflection) of how best to facilitate discussions of Elmer’s sexual identity, I encouraged her to elaborate on this dynamic in our follow-up interview. She made a clear and powerful distinction when speaking with me in person, noting:

RACHEL: \textit{It is not that I don’t want to have these conversations with my students – just the opposite, I really do. What I haven’t figured out yet- You see, the problem is that I don’t want to be the one to bring it up! I am on much more solid ground [professionally] if I am responding to students’ comments and questions about sexuality than I would be were I to be the one introducing the idea – {laughs} as if none of these children are familiar with the word gay let alone gay people.}

COLE: Oh, I see, so you’d like to facilitate these discussions, even though you’re not sure what you’d even say yet, exactly – you trust yourself to-?

RACHEL: I do, I do! I trust that I can handle the ball.

COLE: \{beat\} But it has to be the kids who pitch it to you first.

RACHEL: EXACTLY! That’s exactly what I’m trying to say. So how do we do this, Cole? How do we have these conversations, when, in part, our hands are tied... at least when it comes to starting them? Do you know?

\(^{158}\) Rachel’s point about the tendency among students and teachers to quickly return to the more familiar discourses of difference is well-taken. I have noticed this as well across many of my pilot studies as well as in aspects of this study.

\(^{159}\) Harvey Fierstein, for instance, is a gay activist, so one reading of the book as gay-themed could have been a nod to its author/voice being gay.
COLE: I don’t know that I do, but these are interest points and I don’t know that I’ve ever heard them articulated quite like this by anyone.

RACHEL: Look at us; we’re finishing each other’s sentences! {both laugh} We need to get more people [to be] a part of these kinds of conversations.

COLE: Then it’s just a matter of having a child flick the switch with a comment or question?

RACHEL: Yeah. {pauses before continuing} But I guess even that matters too. I mean how they bring it up...

COLE: {encouraging} Go on.

RACHEL: {clearly at a loss for words} Well, um....

COLE: Do you mean to say that how a kid brings it up. For instance, if he’s making a joke-

RACHEL: Yes, something unkind like, {in the voice of a child} ‘Ew, I bet he’s gay or something! You know a Fa-!’ /stopping herself mid-syllable, she seems to remember who she is talking to: a gay man./ I’m so sorry.

COLE: No, don’t be. That’s exactly what someone might say.

RACHEL: Okay, but then again a kid could also say ‘Ms. [Perkins], do you think maybe he’s gay? You know like my Uncle Andy?’

COLE: Okay, yeah – that too. And you’d say {mimes having just pitched Rachel a ball}

RACHEL: ‘You know, I’m not sure. I guess he might be. What makes you say that, Julie?160 {still in character, opening the question up to the whole group} Was anyone else thinking that?’ I don’t know – something like that.

COLE: Something like that... {nods}

Thanks to my interview with Rachel, I had a much clearer understanding of what she was thinking161. Her initial response about not seeing read-alouds as the place or space for ‘concept

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160 I found it ironic that Rachel role-played asking her students one of the questions I had for her but refrained from asking – not wanting Rachel to feel as though I were challenging her reading of the text.

161 The above exchange reflects two colleagues who are also old friends with an established and understood rhythm to their dialog. However, I feel a responsibility to point out some marked differences in our appropriation of gendered language and our understanding of sexuality in relation to gender, as these were among the few points I made a conscious choice not to raise nor reveal at the time. In her discussion of The Sissy Duckling Rachel’s language bothered me in several ways. To begin, she reads the character of Elmer to be gay, knowing only that he is portrayed as a ‘sissy.’ To a gay man, like myself, who does not identify as especially effeminate, she has equated being a sissy with being gay – as if the two were interchangeable. Additionally she blurs the domains of what she calls ‘gender difference’ and ‘being gay’ – a remarkably complicated and overlapping relationship with a vivid history. Finally, and the part that I find most problematic, Rachel makes repeated use of the expression “sexual preference” instead of sexuality, sexual orientation, or sexual identity. “Sexual preference” is especially difficult to hear an old friend say as it suggests an implicit assumption that my queer sexual identity is simply a choice – that those of us who identify as LGBT/Q have chosen oppressed identities among the rich buffet of options available. To be clear, I do not believe Rachel is homophobic – just unaware of these distinctions and/or careless about her vocabulary. I do mean to broach this matter with Rachel directly in the near future, but will do so friend-to-friend, not in the roles of researcher and participant. I expect she will be more than receptive to such a discussion.
discussions’ and her remark about misguided teachers pushing agendas of their own still seem rather contradictory, still I feel this pedagogical paradox deserves a more nuanced analysis.

First of all, it seems clear that Rachel does not conceptualize all values as being on even footing; furthermore, (and I contend that most any public school teacher would surely agree) her students’ families are unlikely to see all values as equal either – with everything fair game for being taught in school. Toward that end, using instructional time to queer notions of gender identity and sexuality promises to be more provocative [read as predictably inflammatory] in the Kennedy community than would talk of eco-friendly activism. Secondly, Rachel appreciates the prospect of raising such issues as opposed to taking stances on them as markedly different: separate acts for teachers to consider with distinct consequences and responsibilities. Allowing these two ideas to overlap (as it seems they do in context), there are certain topics Rachel feels she, when acting as a classroom teacher, cannot safely raise with her students without inevitably inviting harsh backlash (presumably by their families). By contrast, were any of her students to initiate connections to such taboo topics on their own accord, responding to these matters and facilitating respectful discussions around them is more defensibly within the bounds of a teacher’s pedagogical jurisdiction. By my estimate, how Rachel facilitates discussions and activities around tree huggers moves beyond simply raising issues of environmental responsibility (much less waiting for students to initiate these). Moreover, she adopts a clear position as a tree hugger herself and campaigns for her students to join her in that stance, with little apparent concern that doing so may be read by students’ families as indoctrination – that such values are more socially acceptable and less provocative (within the Kennedy community). Indeed, teachers walk a tightrope regarding which topics they deem to be safe and up for discussion (and even activism), whereas others are seen as too controversial to touch.

Along the lines of tightrope walking, one might say Fern’s rope is closer to the ground. While she privately expressed an interest in further exploring the children’s colorful ideas about
marriage (and where they presumably learned these), Fern is hesitant to weigh in on such classroom conversations much herself. In fact, when a pitch did come her way – this time in the form of a child in her class asking ‘What’s divorce her mean?’ – Fern allowed one of the girl’s classmates to serve as the designated hitter. Noticing only that Fern had not addressed the question (and not initially realizing anyone else had), I followed up with her in this regard during our interview.

COLE: I was wondering if you had heard the one child’s question during your first read-aloud in the series. She asked, ‘‘What’s divorce her mean?’’ Did you hear her? I ask only because I don’t think I caught your answer to the question, but then again I know I don’t always catch everything.

FERN: Actually, I do remember this. She was sitting right up near me {gesturing to a place on the floor beside her, not more than a few feet away} and I did hear her question. I didn’t answer it though because I was pretty sure one of the girls sitting next to her on the carpet had already provided her an answer.

COLE: Do you recall how that student answered the question? I was just curious to hear how one child might explain such a concept to another

FERN: Yeah, {nods} that would have been interesting. I didn’t catch the answer though. I think I just went on with the story once I saw someone had– and I’m not certain who it even was – someone had whispered an answer to her.

Given that Fern acknowledges being especially curious about the children’s discussions of/around marriage she seems to walk a fine line, avoiding a direct role by not pausing to define ‘‘divorce’’162. Perhaps this much is consistent with her concerns that such talk – particularly if she is seen at the center of it, instigating it – presumably may not go over well with some of her students’ families. Here again we see teachers exercising selective censorship.

It is also noteworthy (to me, at least) that, although Fern does not feel she is entrusted to speak to these topics, particularly as a young teacher who is unmarried, untenured, and not [yet] a parent/guardian herself163, she trusts that a child in her class will sufficiently answer another’s question about divorce -- even if she could not hear (or at least recall) the answer herself. In this

162 Where Fern did weigh in on the idea of marriage and relationships most was at the end of The Paper Bag Princess, when she essentially warned her class to steer clear of people like Prince Ronald who were both unappreciative and ungrateful... as well as undeserving of their time or hand in marriage.

163 these being comparatively marginalized identities for teachers at the elementary level in particular
regard Fern’s approach to certain teachable moments is rather different from Rachel’s, who is
waiting for the pitch to come so she can at least take a swing at touchy topics. This difference also
stands in stark contrast to one of my initial interview questions about whole class discussions
around concepts most students are likely familiarity with.

Lost in translation

In the spirit of recognizing missed opportunities and contradictions associated with the
work and behavior of participating teachers, it seems also important to recognize crucial
discrepancies between what this study intends to do and one area in particular where it falls short
– where much is inevitably lost in translation, and in a study of discourse, no less. Whereas I was
never disappointed with the quality of data I collected from the read-aloud lessons themselves, I
did experience some level of frustration when it came to teachers’ written reflections as well as
with our concluding interviews. In each case, the issue was one of miscommunication.

As teachers reflected upon each of their read-aloud lessons, I noticed some of the
predominant topics they covered (e.g., behavior management, apologies for submitting their
journal late [again]) were not as relevant to the study as what I had in mind (e.g., memorable
words, phrases, themes, and exchanges they recall that related to that read-aloud’s class
discussion). Given the nature of this study I did not expressly tell the teachers my interests were
in regard to gender; not wanting to intrude upon their readings of the texts or facilitations of the
read-alouds, that much made perfect sense to me. Instead, from the study’s onset I shared with
participants only that I would be investigating the dynamics of classroom discourse in the context
of their situated read-alouds – i.e., the dynamics of language, talk, interaction, content, and
meaning-making with regard to topics these books inspire (directly or otherwise). I had hoped
that by clarifying this much for the teachers prior to any actual data collection, each journal entry
would reflect this focus.

To complicate the issue, I did not catch this apparent miscommunication until after the
fact, having made a deliberate effort *not* to read these reflections until I had collected the full set
of four from each participant. The intention behind this decision was that I did not want my
having read a given reflection in one room to influence my interactions with the teacher or my
consideration of the next read-aloud event. If, for instance, I found the teacher focusing upon a
recurring dynamic or set of students in her reflection, it would be hard to imagine that not
influencing what I watched in the subsequent data collection episodes as well. Likewise, this
arrangement was also intended to help me keep my hand out of the research cookie jar. In other
words, to follow up on one aspect in a reflective journal, asking the participant about it, would
likely privilege that point of interest at the expense of others the teacher may have written in her
next reflection. The downside of deciding not to read these – and I maintain it was a choice I
would make again – was twofold. Firstly, doing so I relinquished the opportunity to redirect the
focus of my participants’ reflection (to guide them toward the types of points that would be of
most value to my study, before the next reflection). Secondly, by *not* reading these reflections, I
never realized that early on, Fern had been asking me question, and awaiting my response (e.g.,
“...Is this okay?”; “Would you rather I...?”); my silence could have been frustrating for a
participant who may have initially understood the reflection process as a dialog journal between
us. Fortunately, both teachers tended to touch upon a number of topics in each reflection so there
was always something of value for me to use.

More so even than the situated journal reflections, the face-to-face interviews presented
noteworthy discrepancies between the kinds of information I knew myself to be asking for with
each question and the kinds of answers participants were prepared to provide. For instance, I
asked the following scripted series of questions:
COLE: What ideas or attitudes about gender (if any) do you believe surfaced across these read-alouds and/or accompanying discussions? Do you sense that any such notions of gender were affirmed? Challenged? Revised? Ignored by one or more of your students’ thinking? That challenged your own thinking? Did any of the books especially lend themselves to provocative discussion of gender? If so, which ones and why?

Although the teachers had much to say that was rich and on topic, I found myself repeatedly asking the teachers to qualify their answers by providing specific words, phrases, statements, or anecdotal exchanges they recalled that evidenced each point. Despite their having watched the video footage, neither of the teachers came to the follow-up interviews ready to provide those kinds of details in regard to my questions, particularly when I have dozens of questions on-hand\textsuperscript{164} and the participants are entirely blind to these questions ahead of time. My reasons for not sharing the question ahead of time were twofold: first of all, the questions took considerable time to formulate and prepare\textsuperscript{165} so waiting until I had these ready would have meant stalling the distribution of CDs to teachers as well as delaying when we could conduct the follow-up interviews\textsuperscript{166}. Secondly, I wanted to allow each teacher the chance to watch the videos as she might on her own, not with me pointing her gaze in the directions I was looking already. This much was clear by the first question I posed to begin each interview:

COLE: As you think back over the four read-alouds you let me record, does anything come to mind for you that you want to bring to my attention\textsuperscript{167}?

\textsuperscript{164} Given the constraints of keeping these interviews to under one hour each, we did not always have time for all of the questions I had planned. Fortunately, I had organized my questions in such a manner that those I felt to be of highest priority for each participant were slated to surface relatively early on in the discussion.

\textsuperscript{165} each based upon my watching all the video footage as well as drawing upon ideas that came up in each of their four reflections

\textsuperscript{166} as it was, I had concerns about too much time passing between the actual read-alouds and the interviews

\textsuperscript{167} The follow-up prompt I prepared (should anyone need to elaborate) was as follows:

COLE: Having revisited your reflections as well as watching the video footage of the read-alouds themselves, are there any salient remarks, patterns, connections, new ideas, perspectives, points of interest, or developments you might wish to share with me?
This served as an effective way to let the teachers take the reigns of the interview, at least initially. Unfortunately, whenever I asked if there were specific remarks or exchanges they could recall that were particularly representative of __________, it was all too clear that the teachers were unable to recall such specifics. We were not dealing in the same currency.

Much of this speaks to the broader issue I face as a researcher: at some level, there are matters simply “lost in translation” between what I bring to the table (and am looking for) and what my participants have to offer. I have dedicated five years of my doctoral studies to developing some level of situated expertise in terms of the critical analysis of pedagogical resources and curricular texts, impassioned concerns with regard to issues of gendering, and a particular fascination with pedagogical discourses (as classroom talk). Knowing that I embrace these skills sets as well as my research-related goals and curiosities, it was foolish of me in hindsight to expect each classroom teacher to meet me on the same plane with these matters. Taking for granted a common language was simply naïve. Certainly the classroom teacher I was five years ago would not have been in a position to provide the kinds of answers I was looking for.

At the same time, it is also important to keep in mind that I am not the only party approaching the interview table with a wheelbarrow full of knowledges and understandings. In fact, both participants brought with them a far deeper familiarity and awareness of their students than I could ever hope to capture, having witnessed only four lessons in their classroom. They, of course, bring all the perspective as well as all the advantage that goes along with having established a rapport with their students while shouldering the multitude of responsibilities they bear routinely. They, for instance, had already facilitated hundreds of activities with this class, surely dozens between conducting their fourth read-aloud in the series and sitting down for our interview. All these factors combine to inform the way we each speak to and come to understand our work. When the two of us come into conversation with one another one can only expect to
have some levels of dissonance. Fortunately, our established rapport and my background as an elementary classroom teacher – granted not of their students, at their school, or in any of these specific contexts – afforded me much to draw upon to still make the concluding interviews rich, if not exactly in the way I had initially imagined them to be.

My having conducted a read-aloud lesson during the weeks of my data collection provided valuable perspective for me as a researcher. Surely I entered that read-aloud experience as a teacher with heightened levels of interest in gender(ing) and pedagogical discourse; these are, after all, words that command my attention each day I committed to my dissertation study... as well as most every day in between, or so it seems. I mention this to expose my bias – that I expected to be able to stay keenly aware of these things during the read-aloud itself. Boy, was I ever mistaken!

Back in the seat of a teacher, with more than 20 faces staring back at me, I experienced an avalanche of stimuli to consider\textsuperscript{168}. Make no mistake, I relished every minute of the lesson, enjoying opportunities where I felt I effectively engaged the students’ higher level thinking skills, pleased with my ability to adequately manage what I observed to be a range of behavioral needs and academic skill levels. More than that, I also remember sensing that the students enjoyed the story – that they relished the experience (as did I) and that our discussion was both enthusiastic and thoughtful. Were someone who observed the lesson to ask me to reflect on how things went, I suspect my first instincts may have been to speak to matters of behavior management. Not just, I think, because I was still rather unfamiliar with these students and how best to meet their specific needs, but because I believe most teachers have some level of insecurity when it comes to behavior management and being observed for the first time (by a colleague or camera). We want

\textsuperscript{168} Granted, I did not know all of these students’ name prior to the lesson so that complicated matters, but I also had only that lesson to teach – no concern for the rest of the day’s instructional schedule, who needed to take medications when, who has instrument lessons when, etc.
so badly not to be perceived as having poor behavior management skills\textsuperscript{169} that our minds prioritize that to be front most in our thinking – at least, throughout those moments when we are conscious of the state of surveillance. I would like to believe that I relaxed as the event began to unfold and it was just the kids and me and the story. However, were an observer to approach me afterward, asking me about the lesson, I would probably speak first to the insecurity and then bring in some of the other nuggets I remembered. Were someone to ask me to speak to the lesson several days later, much less a week or more, I imagine I might retain some of the nuggets, but certainly in less detail than someone who had watched the lesson repeatedly on video, taking laborious notes on each utterance, and preparing to interview me about it.

**Reflections, Revisions, and Recommendations: If I Only Knew Then What I Know Now**

Throughout the course of this study, I gained increasing perspective along the way. In a sense, the experience was as much an investigation of my specific research question as it was an inquiry into the process of conducting a strong and viable study. In an effort to identify the strengths and limitations of this study, as well as to recognize the professional growth this manuscript is (and my continued research promises to be) a testament to, I dedicate the remaining pages of this chapter to completing the sentence: *If I only knew then what I know now*...

**Frontloading intentions**

If I only knew then what I know now, I would have put more consideration into the idea of frontloading intentions – both mine as a researcher and those of the teacher-participants.

\textsuperscript{169} or perhaps with others the insecurity might take root with regard to having mastery of the content, time management, etc.
My research intentions

I see strengths and weaknesses in the idea of telling teachers from the get-go that gender is a central focus of the study. In hindsight, I feel confident that I made the right decision for the purposes of this study; however, I recall feeling conflicted about the choice to not explicitly disclose this information at several points along the way. Early on, I worried my having not mentioned gender directly would read as a paper-thin veil, particularly to participants who knew me (and my research interests) well. Likewise, I thought the collection of gender-themed books I assembled might tip the scales toward my being read as having an obvious agenda – as if I was testing them with a simple riddle, trying to see if they would notice that gender was the common thread linking each of the available texts together.

My sense, now, is that neither participant responded unfavorably toward this decision nor were they suspicious of me or my agenda. In their follow-up interviews with me, both teachers indicated that they had realized a connection each of the books shared (at least, the last three texts read as a part of the study) with regard to gender and (as they each put it) “stereotypes." I am not certain that either teacher came to this conclusion at the book-ranking stage of events, but by the time each facilitated her third book – and for both cases this happened to be The Princess Knight – it was clear both teachers were drawing connections across the books with their

170 The term stereotype surfaced repeatedly in each classroom at one point or another; however, I do not always believe that the word was used with consistency or clarity of meaning (in either classroom). As I see it, there are overlapping (if perhaps subtle) differences between terms like archetype, gender norm, gender roles, chauvinism, sexism, prejudice, and bias, yet the word “stereotype” was re-appropriated as being synonymous with each of these words (none of which were uttered directly) across the pair of classrooms. Whereas I can appreciate the developmental appropriateness of trying to avoid overwhelming children with too many new and complex terms at once, I wonder what clarity is sacrificed in the casual misappropriation of words with distinct meanings used interchangeably.

171 In fact, Rachel’s facilitation of Aani and the Tree Huggers as a read-aloud (see Chapter 4) suggests she did not conceptualize gender to be a central theme to that book.
students. I was pleased to know they made these associations – each to a different text\footnote{Fern associated \textit{The Princess Knight} with \textit{The Paper Bag Princess} whereas Rachel made reference to \textit{Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare} as she facilitated her read-aloud with \textit{The Princess Knight}.} – on their own accord and presumably \textit{not} because of anything I said or did. Taking this a step further, by my estimate, explicitly telling the participants I was focused especially upon gender(ing) may well have made for richer reflections and interviews (where participants would likely stay focused on the topic of gender), but doing so, would have compromised my primary data set, influencing the read-alouds themselves.

I see no harm in making it somehow clearer to all participants, early on and repeatedly throughout, that I am most curious about dynamics of talk and classroom discussions – \textit{not}, for instance, behavior management, etc. Having recently taken the opportunity to conduct a read-aloud myself, I am reminded how difficult it is to retain the detail of what (precisely) people say and do – particularly when the teacher cannot, in the moment, pause the scene to scribe each detail. Although I did mention this focus often, particularly early on and throughout each of our interviews, clearly I need to find a better means of communicating this focus more effectively, perhaps pairing its explanation with a collective brainstorming session to help teachers find strategies to retain such information. My concern, of course, with this budding idea is that I would not want to significantly affect the \textit{way} teachers teach.

\textbf{My teacher-participants’ intentions}

I would also like to explore how teacher-participants might be more transparent about their intentions when they volunteer to be a part of a study like this. Initially, when I put out a call for participants throughout RASD (see Appendix C), the announcement was rather vague and
neglected to provide my actual research question(s). As such, aside from knowing I hoped to videotape a series of read-alouds in their classrooms, I remain uncertain what motivated those who eventually volunteered. Given the relationships I had throughout RASD, one of my suspicions is that people were simply willing to do me a favor – their participation served me and not necessarily themselves. If this is the case, reproducing the study in districts new to me becomes complicated.

I would much prefer that people who agree to participate in a study like this do so because they feel they have something to gain from the experience. Based upon the nature of our exchanges and rapport throughout, I am confident that Rachel saw me as a colleague with whom she wanted to work through some of her ideas; this much was especially evident given the nature of our interview. I am less convinced that Fern approached the study for these reasons. Although she did take note of a new facet to explore (i.e., arranged marriages) in regard to *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* and she expressed some desire to expand her book selection process for read-alouds as a result of this experience, my interview with Fern had an entirely different feeling. I do not know how else to explain it but to say that when she answered questions, it felt like she was filling in paperwork. Her answers tended toward being closed – not closed off to me, per se, but final as in she had fulfilled her responsibility with each answer. The following demonstrates this contrast:

**COLE:** At times, the children were called upon to share what they thought different characters might be thinking and/or feeling. ... Were there any distinguishable differences you noticed about how students (or even you) interpreted characters’ feelings as opposed to what they were thinking?

**RACHEL:** Ah, interesting. So you’re talking about something pretty subtle here; am I right? {Cole shakes his head in the affirmative.} Wow, I’ll be honest, I know I didn’t watch for that specifically – and I think I would need to catch something like that – but if I knew that ahead of time I could have looked for it. {offering} Do you want me to do that?

**COLE:** That’s okay, really-
RACHEL: Alright, well then, since I can’t answer, YOU have to. {laughs} Are you noticing something along those lines?

COLE: You know, I’m not sure. I would have to look more closely at this point, but I notice something; I’m just not sure what it is or means... We should probably go on to the next question.

FERN: I don’t follow. I have my kids do both.

COLE: Yes, and I’ve noticed that. My apologies for the phrasing on this because I still don’t feel like I know how to phrase what it is I’m asking. {beat} I’m just curious if there’s anything that goes through your mind differently or even theirs when you refer to how some characters feel versus what some characters think. For instance, did they focus more on how certain characters move about the world as feelers of it, whereas others presumably reason their way through everything? It probably sounds like I’m splitting hairs; no?

FERN: I think I understand what you’re asking, but honestly, I don’t remember. I didn’t watch for that... Should we just jump to the next question?

Given that I will be moving to a new university and PDS where I do not yet have the kinds of relationships with teachers in the local districts there, I would especially like to explore advertising studies like this completely differently. I plan to present them as professional development opportunities and, ideally, be able to have them recognized as such. So, for instance, I would want to look into affording teacher-participants formal, recognizable credit (e.g., from their district or the state) for being a part of such a study. Still, I think getting people interested in seeing such studies (similar to but not a reproduction of this one) as opportunities for their own professional growth would likely entail providing a clearer sense of what it is I am looking to do. For instance, it may help to advertise it as a “gender study” of sorts and try to attract those teachers interested in such matters – almost like it could be a graduate level independent study (for practicing teacher) cross-listed with the Women’s and Gender Studies Department. Presented still another way, it could be a similar professional development opportunity for educators who want to become more self-reflective about the way they facilitate discussions with their students:
a “discourse study,” perhaps, serving as part of a workshop on teaching educators how to make meaningful use of Studiocode software and technologies.

**Texts and text selection**

If I only knew then what I know now I may have adjusted my thinking with regard to the book selection process and its significance from the very onset. To clarify, I do not regret having read and researched a plethora of children’s books – considering easily more than 500 individual texts. Doing this helped me develop the background knowledge I needed, affording me a wealth of understanding with regard to representations of gender in children’s literature. This exhaustive task also provided me with an enormous pool of books to consider for use in this study and others (e.g., with several of my pilot studies already and, hopefully, extending to future studies as well).

I do, however, regret having invested so much time and effort moving in the wrong direction. I focused too much of my energy early on (prior to even drafting the proposal for what would become my dissertation study) designing, developing, and applying an original categorization system for children’s books that qualify as gender-themed (as I define the term in Chapter 3). Although this work may prove useful someday and with others projects (as several of my committee members pointed out long before I was ready to hear them), it essentially amounted to months of work that held little significance to this study—save irony.

As luck would have it, the most noteworthy role these categories did, in fact, play was to introduce some unnecessary confusion. As it turns out, I misappropriated one of the categorical labels I had, in fact, designed myself—wrongly ascribing *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995) as gender-themed, which I came to realize only later it was not. Having mistakenly included the wrong book in the initial collection of gender-themed texts I made available to teacher-participants for ranking purposes, it was not until I actually observed Rachel conducting a
read-aloud with this text that I realized my error. Fortunately, the book served only as her “free-choice” reading selection – and, in fact, coincidentally provided an interesting foil to Fern’s reading of *The Boy of the Three Year Nap*, likewise a RASD approved book for the Japan/Asia unit. Were both participants to have ranked *Aani and the Tree Huggers* high on their lists – which, thank goodness, was not the case – my mistake may have more noticeably affected the study, serving as one of the “gender-themed” texts in multiple rooms when, it fact, it was undeserving of such a categorical distinction.

Rather than frontloading so much thought into creating a categorization system based around varying degrees of gendered representations in children’s literature, in hindsight, it would have made more sense to have closely considered just those books ranking highest among prospective participants (see Figure 3-1). With this in mind, I could have been certain to assign books to teachers in such a way that each character had at least one counterpart figure featured in at least one of the other classrooms. Having not fully considered this prior to collecting my data, I regret having had only one sissy character representation from which to draw upon in either classroom. Despite the fact that Rachel’s *The Sissy Duckling* lesson allowed for some of the most fascinating data I collected, having only one case and lesson reflective of this made it impossible to establish thematic tendencies across classrooms and books.

Taking each of the books in my study through RASD’s elaborate approval process – affording each text the distinction of now being listed as “district-approved” – was most certainly not a mistake. Although both Fern and Rachel assured me (from the study’s onset) they would

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173 As I mention in Chapter 4, watching Rachel conduct a read-aloud with the book, it occurred to me that her students and she made very little explicit reference to gender throughout the lesson, instead constructing the conflicting sides of a dispute not as men and women (as I had, in my own gendered reading of it), but as city people and villagers.

174 A mistake of quality control on my end of things, my sense is that I may have scrutinized *Aani and the Tree Huggers* less than some of the other texts I considered using because of what it uniquely offered. Unlike any of the other books in the collection of texts I brought around to prospective participants to rank by preference, this stood out as the only text where the protagonists were people of color and the narrative was representative of life and perspectives beyond the western hemisphere (see Appendix A).
have no trouble facilitating most any read-aloud with their respective students. I came to realize that each teacher was far more accustomed to using district-approved books than those that were not recognized as such. During our interview, Fern commented that she had not realized how closely she had been clinging to the suggested books related to each curricular unit and, although she liked those books, she did notice the books she read as part of this study seemed to engage her students in exceptional and exciting ways. In Rachel’s final reflection, having just finished her read-aloud lesson with *The Sissy Duckling*, she commented:

> One of the things that I’m aware of as result of reading the books that Cole chose to include in his study is that I rarely use books with my students that aren’t part of the unit. Part of the reason is that there are so many books in each unit that I never get to because of time so I don’t choose to use any other books since I feel that I have more than enough to read to the students as it is. However, using these books [the ones in this study] has nudged me to think about the possibility of making conscious decisions as a teacher to use books that bring up topics such as prejudice, stereotype, gender and races differences, ecological concerns and sexual preference. I believe that it’s important for our society and our world to discuss these topics and I would like to continue to process how I might facilitate more relevant discussions with my students. I found that I could find time and ways to use the books to support reading and discussions skills [and] I feel that my students benefited from hearing and discussing the stories.

It is gratifying to know that not only had each of the teacher-participants found these books to be useful with their students, but that the experience also led each teacher to take stock of her book-selection process and perhaps make adjustments she had not previously considered. Not only did honoring the district’s approval process help me to better appreciate how district protocol works at RASD, but it has allowed me the chance to leave something tangible behind from this study: each of the ten books I moved through the district approval process will now be listed among unit books for teachers to consider in RASD. Foreseeably, this may introduce new titles to many RASD teachers who were not even directly a part of my study.

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175 provided each, as participants, had some say in approving the texts as age-/grade-level appropriate (while selecting the text from among an array of choices)
Data recording sources and strategies

If I only knew then what I know now I would consider making a number of adjustments to the ways I approach data collection in general. This includes everything from fine-tuning existing procedures to adding additional sources and forms of data.

Familiar sources and strategies revisited

While ecstatic with both the quantity and quality of rich data I was able to capture and consider via the video footage of all eight read-alouds, I am hesitant to make any dramatic changes to the way I would approach or conceptualize the collection of my primary data set. Adding an extension microphone early on proved to be an efficient means to significantly improve the audio clarity of recordings for each of the remaining seven lessons. This change, in turn, eased my transcription efforts and allowed each child (quite literally) to be heard.

One area where it seems not all voices were heard, at least not initially, was with regard to scheduling. In response to my question, “When might I be able to come in to observe you conducting read-alouds?” Fern was especially generous with her time, affording me windows of time most every morning (35-40 minutes) and afternoon (20-25 minute) from which to choose. Given the complexities of my own busy schedule and my inclination to pick from among the longer time intervals available, I arranged for Fern’s first two read-alouds to take place among the available AM timeslots. I regret not realizing until her third reading that Fern had a clear preference for the briefer windows of time each afternoon – believing her students to be more

176 The decision to add an extension microphone came after I had already videotaped Rachel’s first read-aloud lesson and realized that the camera’s built-in microphone had trouble capturing some of the comments from two of Rachel’s more soft-spoken students.

177 My thinking here was that this would afford more time for discussion and decrease the likelihood that the teacher or students would feel rushed throughout the lesson.
focused at that time of day and preferring to not have her third-graders seated on the carpet for longer than 20-25 minutes at a time. I should have asked, “When do you typically conduct read-alouds with your class each day?” and “Of these allotted times, are there certain days each week you would prefer I come (or not come) to observe you conducting read-alouds? Perhaps posing the question differently would have better honored her time.

Speaking of the need to be mindful of my teacher-participants’ time, I find myself revisiting the question of “just how many read-alouds do I need to observe/capture/consider in each classroom?” For the purposes of this study, I was more than satisfied to have had the opportunity to collect as much data as I did. Although I can speculate that collecting one more round of data in each classroom (i.e., a fifth read-aloud) might have made the data (and my understanding of it) that much richer, I worry too about the researcher who wears out his/her welcome (and reputation). The fact that one of the veteran teachers who initially volunteered for the study promptly rescinded her offer when she realized just how much time and energy she might be committing to as a study participant (i.e., four lessons, four reflections, and a concluding interview) suggests I was asking quite a bit of my participants already. Had I conducted this study instead with one less round of data I may have gained more potential volunteers, but my suspicion is that study itself would have suffered a net loss. If Fern and Rachel had stopped after their third read-alouds, these data would lose all evidence of the only class debate that occurred as well as any mention of sissies. In the early stages of planning this study I had imagined collecting data across a series of three read-alouds, all of which would have been with gender-themed texts from the collection I made available to all the teachers. In Chapter 3 I highlight some of the reasons that led to adding a free-choice read-aloud to front-end the series, serving as a dress rehearsal of sorts. Both Fern and Rachel expressed relief at having

178 Structured differently, my suspicion is that a future study, one where teachers receive credit for their participation as a recognized professional development experience, might afford greater allowances.
this chance for a run-through round (in case something went wrong), commenting on the familiarity of that first reading easing tensions as the first text of the series was one they each had already used with a previous class. Given the fact that both participating teachers appreciated the free-choice round, I would not see its elimination as doing the teacher any favors. A second aspect to this free-choice round, by design, was that I made no commitment ahead of time as to whether or not I would analyze that subset of data. Discarding the set was an option I considered but dismissed, as I thought the pair of gendered-peripheries brought something unique to the mix, serving not only in juxtaposition to one another as both representative of the Japan/Asia unit, but also falling into interesting thematic conversations with the other texts in discursive ways I could not have predicted. Looking back, I could not be more pleased with my decision to have collected and considered data from each of all four rounds of my primary data set for this study.

Moving on to some of my secondary data (see Figure 3-2), I think there was room for improvement with regard to the teacher reflections that followed each read-aloud lesson. Were I to have guided the process more closely on the front-end, I expect the content of their reflections may have had more to do with the nature and topics of discussion in each read-aloud – what I had in mind for these to be. I am hesitant, however, to dismiss the value of allowing these to be their reflections\(^\text{179}\): a testament to what stands out most in their minds after each lesson. I also sense that had I been firmer about holding participants to the 24-hour turnaround window for these reflections, participants may have remembered the lessons in greater detail and offered deeper reflections. It seems the counterargument for being more firm than I was on maintaining these deadlines is twofold: collegial rapport could suffer if I step too stridently into the shoes of an authority figure, particularly when I have neither carrot nor stick to move things along more

\(^{179}\) Of note, neither participant took me up on my offer to accept their reflections as informal audio podcast or vlog files. By design, these options were intended to afford participants some degree of choice, flexibility, and convenience. I know both of these teachers to be very tech-savvy individuals, so I do not imagine either of them was intimidated by the prospect of “not knowing how” to record audio or video files as such. It may be that both Fern and Rachel happen to prefer expressing themselves in writing.
speedily anyway. Too, my comparative evidence does not suggest that the reflections that came in earliest were more substantive or on-topic; in fact, a case could be made that the opposite holds true. One participant, whose reflections came in consistently behind schedule, often provided greater detail and the topics she discussed proved to be more directly relevant to the nature of this study.

While the concluding interviews proved to be very informative, they are probably the data collection method that would benefit most from a makeover. For each case, I invested a great deal of time watching the set of four lessons back (repeatedly), scouring their corresponding reflections as well as the initial book rankings survey sheets, and revisiting my field notes and research log.

Were I to have afforded Rachel and Fern my respective lists of questions, each would surely have been more prepared to answer them specifically. However, to do this would likely change the way the teachers approached watching the video footage. Not unlike looking at the chapter questions to answer before reading a given textbook chapter, this would likely steer the participants to primarily look in the directions I pointed them. A casualty to this convenience, I would potentially miss what each participant might have seen or considered otherwise.

I wonder what the merits might be to reconceptualizing the structure of the interview experience entirely – instead of having just one culminating interview, I might split the difference, checking in with teacher-participants for a brief interview after just the first two read-alouds (then again after lessons three and four). That way, things are likely to be fresher in people’s minds. Surely I could prepare such interview questions much more speedily drawing upon only half as many sources; however, I worry that I would have less data upon which to surface emerging patterns, trends, or themes. Likewise, participants may be less likely to draw connections across all four read-alouds (or even just the first and third, etc). I also have some concerns about ideas that surface during the midterm interview coloring or affecting (even just
subconsciously) how the participant approaches her third and fourth read-alouds. Although the idea of employing a multiple interview design has potential, it seems a poor fit for future studies of this design study.

Certainly, I would construct my questions differently were I to repeat this study, drawing less upon detailed recollection and specificity overall. Another adjustment I would make would be to pair some of my more detailed questions with relevant excerpt clips to play at different points in the interview. This would give participants a chance to revisit their language and actions in context when questions call for this.

**New sources and strategies considered**

It seems an important next step for me to consider how I might start folding in more student perspective(s) to such continued investigations. With no intention of conducting personal student interviews or the like\(^{180}\), other avenues of latent opportunity can be pursued, provided the intention here is *not* to allow the researcher’s interests to alter or complicate the classroom teacher’s plans, but merely to capitalize upon new and different data sources that support the read-aloud itself. Example activities might include asking students to fill in a Venn Diagram at their seats, comparing and contrasting Princess Violetta with Princess Elizabeth or Prince Ronald and Rotten Ritchie. Collecting (or photographing) of these activity sheets extends opportunities to “hear” more voices about the room, and see what ideas/understandings students tend to endorse/retain from these lessons (i.e., *what sticks?*) as well as what they might confuse, challenge, forget (to mention) or simply dismiss.

\(^{180}\) which lend themselves to being increasingly invasive and take more time, instructional and otherwise
Coding data

If I only knew then what I know now I would have approached the process of coding more strategically from day one – in order to arrive at my eventual codes at a much faster pace. However, while I made some missteps in how I initially approached coding, I cannot say that the time was wasted as it led me to rule out many under-developed ideas as well as to arrive at the codes I have now – codes I feel have served me well in my analysis of these data. I anticipate bringing many of the codes from this study along with me to my next series of research projects. However, it seems important not to presume such codes will simply =’fit’/’work’, as is. Beyond the context of this study, I anticipate that my current codes will provide me a far better “starting point” for my future research projects – a sound point of entry but hardly a skeleton key to the kingdom. Keeping in mind, of course, if one truly values the experience of arriving at codes specific to his/her data set, (and I do), there are no skeleton keys to coding.

Closing Thoughts

When I think back upon this chapter and in fact upon all the chapters that have preceded it (not only in page number but also in terms of how my thinking has evolved), I am reminded of an inspiring text and child:

... both of which I wish I had come to know as an elementary student, but were it not to be then, I surely should have been introduced to this pair as an elementary classroom teacher

... both of which, back then (and even today), would likely be read as unwelcome troublemakers, particularly so in schools
... both indeed gender-themed texts if ever there were two gender-themed texts to read and respond to – to inspire pedagogical discourses of gender(ing) in their truest sense.

Indeed, it has been more than 35 years since Lois Gould brought X into the world (and into kindergarten) – more than 35 years have passed since X: A Fabulous Child’s Story (1972) was first published and read. In Chapter 1, I introduced the reader to both X, the child, and X, the written narrative, remarking that I found these texts to be perhaps the most accessible representations of both gender and gendering I knew. Having initially met both Xes myself less than five years ago, as a doctoral student at the time, I remember finding the pair intellectually stimulating and provocative. I remember wanting everyone I knew to become acquainted them – my students (preservice teachers at the time, but my former elementary students as well), my educator colleagues, my family and friends. I wanted to introduce X (and X) to all of them, but I was initially hesitant to introduce all of them to X, protective, like Mr. and Mrs. Jones, no doubt, that others might not receive X with an open mind or open heart. In the Spring of 2005 I found small ways (with pockets of people from each of these groups) to familiarize others with X. Given that most of the people I know socially are parents, educators, or both, I recall those aspects of their respective identities falling into our discussions around X (and X). Many people had an appreciation for the idea of X – conceptualized always as a hypothetical work of fiction, an idea on a page – yet they were (as I was and am) consistently overwhelmed by the number of considerations and precautions that must go into parenting and/or teaching this child.

Four years later now and it is 2009; suddenly I am reading news articles (Garfinkel, 2009; Parafianowicz, 2009; Parasher, 2009; Sjöström, 2009) explaining how a couple in Sweden have been raising their child, two-and-a-half by the Spring of 2009, in much the same was the Jones Family (and Gould, at least as an author) set out to do with X. These articles, drawn from the
initial interview with the parents in March (Sjöström, 2009), refer to the child by the pseudonym, Pop, so as to protect his/her-the family’s anonymity.

Pop’s parents ... both 24, made a decision when their baby was born to keep Pop’s sex a secret. ... if anyone enquires, Pop’s parents simply say they don’t disclose this information. In an interview with newspaper Svenska Dagbladet in March, the parents were quoted saying their decision was rooted in the feminist philosophy that gender is a social construction. “We want Pop to grow up more freely and avoid being forced into a specific gender mould from the outset,” Pop’s mother said. “It's cruel to bring a child into the world with a blue or pink stamp on their forehead.” (Parafianowicz, 2009)

As one might anticipate, the articles go on to provide opinions of all kinds – each professing to represent expertise in its respective field. Among them a psychologist/newspaper columnist, a gender equality consultant, and a pediatric endocrinologist weigh in on how admirable or irresponsible Pop’s parents are and how doomed or fortunate Pop is. No matter where people stand on this matter – and the online message boards for such articles certainly represent a range of impassioned responses, many of them negative – the fact that Pop already exists (and has existed for more than two years now) propels the discursive conversation forward Markedly. No longer a hypothetical what if\(^\text{181}\), but a when.  

What happens when Pop shows up in a pre-K classroom?

How will teachers respond? How will they prepare differently (or not) for such a child logistically as well as discursively? For as well as I know Fern and Rachel, I can only begin to imagine how they might approach the task of being Pop’s teacher (and, presumably, being Pop’s student as well).

According to Anna Nordenström, a paediatric endocrinologist who studies hormonal

\(^{181}\) as was/has been the case with X (Gould, 1972)
influences on gender development, “...if Pop is still ‘genderless’ by the time he or she starts school, Pop will certainly receive a lot of attention from classmates.” (Parafianowicz, 2009)

Whereas Dr. Nordenström’s formal training lies more in the realms of anatomy and physiology – than it does in education or sociology, I would be hard-pressed to disagree that Pop’s presence in school is sure to be a catalyst for any number of reactions, foreseeable and otherwise. I find myself wondering...

How will the other children respond? How will their parents/guardians feel about their children being in Pop’s class? How will Pop interact with and respond to Pop’s classmates?

As a researcher (and a confessed Davies-enthusiast), I wonder how might the nature of Davies’ two “frogs and snails and feminist tales studies” (1989; Davies & Kasama, 2004) have played out differently were Pop among the preschoolers in her study? Indeed, how might my study have played out differently had Pop been a part of the conversation. What might Pop have to say about Elmer or Prince Ronald? -about Princess Violetta or Rotten Richie?

As an author, I cannot imagine a more timely situation to lend study (and my continued work/research) significance. As a teacher, a researcher, a queer feminist, and an uncle, I am overcome with enthusiasm for new possibilities to emerge in terms of empowering pedagogical discourses of gender(ing).

Somewhere down the road, I would like to imagine all of us making great strides of progress, both as a profession and as a people, in terms of how we appreciate the relationship between discourses and doctrines of gender(ing). Who knows? A decade or more form now we may all know an X or Pop through our experiences teaching them, parenting them, loving them, or even realizing ourselves to be them.

182 The notion that Pop is ‘genderless’ presumes that there are only two available genders. On the contrary, I contend that what Pop represents – what Pop and Pop’s family have done/are doing queers this notion entirely – having carved out still another (among what I conceptualize to potentially be many) gendered availabilities.
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Young Readers.


Books for Young Readers.


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Appendix A

Text Use Selection Criteria

Between the series of related pilot studies I had conducted previously and the detailed review of gender-themed literature I coordinated for one of my comprehensive examination projects in 2007, I had no trouble selecting twenty gender-themed texts to potentially use for my study. Working with Gina Whitman – an experienced RASD third grade teacher and an enthusiastic participant in one of my earlier pilot studies of this nature – we were able to narrow the pool of books to just a set of nine that I would make available to my participants.

In addition to taking age, grade level curricula, and academic standards into consideration, Gina and I also made every effort to provide for a broad range of story structures, and narratives to exist in what would become the definitive set of nine texts from which teacher-participants might rank and select their books for use as read-alouds in my study. For instance, we looked for a range of character representations among the protagonists in the stories we selected. Among my preliminary collection of twenty gender-themed texts, the vast majority of these narratives’ lead characters were Caucasian girls or women. Gina championed my efforts to feature some male representations and people of color as well as some stories where the lead characters animals (and not humans at all). Gina did, however, discourage using any of the books from my collection that featured characters who explicitly identified as LGBT/Q – not because she found them to be inherently inappropriate for use in general, but Gina did feel they would complicate the study in ways that I may not want. Among the complications she predicted, not only would I likely experience tremendous difficulty and resistance getting such books successfully through the district–approval process, but I may also lose a significant percentage of potential participants as well. Gina and I also considered a range of literary structures and
perspectives among the available texts, ruling out those that were not picture books or did not have a singular narrative structure. This was not with concern about getting such books approved for use as read-alouds at the district level, but neither Gina nor I was convinced such books would likely hail the kinds of discussions I was hoping to capture and observe for my study. In the end, Gina and I were both satisfied with the definitive set of nine gender-themed texts I would make available for participants in my study to consider, rank, and potentially facilitate as read-alouds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER-THEMED Children’s Texts (By Narrative Structural Sub-Categories)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[B1] JUXTAPOSED GENDER SUBSTITUTIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Brave Little Princess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate and the Beanstalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Bobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[B2] SITUATIONAL GENDER DETOURS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aani and the Tree Huggers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Paper Bag Princess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotten Ritchie and the Ultimate Dare</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[B3] GENDER-BENDING DISRUPTIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Princess Knight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace and Morris but Mostly Delores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sissy Duckling</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Descriptor Symbols Key (Representative Factors Considered When Narrowing Initial Lists)

1. Narrative features one or more female protagonists
2. Narrative features one or more male protagonists
3. Narrative features one or more protagonist characters who are non-white
4. Narrative features one or more protagonist characters who is/are explicitly LGBT/Q
5. Narrative features protagonists who are animals or plants (behaving like humans)
6. Narrative is situated beyond conventionally industrialized and/or western society
7. Historical non-fiction (or based upon true events) featuring a single narrative
8. Historical fiction featuring a single narrative
9. Historical non-fiction featuring a collection of multiple narratives
10. Non-narratives: ABC books or collection of nursery rhymes and/or poems
11. Texts with few or no illustrations (e.g., chapter books, collections of short stories)

As I touch upon in both Chapters 4 and 6, I believe I mischaracterized *Aani and the Tree Huggers* as a gender-themed text. Of note, it is the only text in this narrowed collection of nine books where the characters were people of color and the narrative was representative of life and perspectives beyond the western hemisphere.
Appendix B

Subjectivity in the Book Approval Process

Of note, one district librarian initially rejected Munsch’s *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980) – certainly the most well-known book in my collection and one that Bronwyn Davies used repeatedly in her studies, with preschoolers, no less (1989, 2004) – because she deemed the text inappropriate for this age group. She worried that one of Michael Martchenko’s illustrations in particular (see image below) would invite inappropriate and uncontrollable laughter, such that a classroom teacher would not be able to get his/her students back on task.

![Image of a dragon and a castle]

“Unfortunately, a dragon smashed her castle, burned all her clothes with fiery breath, and carried off Prince Ronald.”

(Munsch, 1980, p. 3-4)

None of the others involved in the approval process shared these concerns and, upon a second review from another librarian in the district, sailed through the approval process without a hitch. Weeks later, two of the three participating teachers in the study ranked *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980) among the top choices to use and the third participant noted she had already facilitated a read-aloud with it at the beginning of the school year – as she does each year.
Appendix C

Email Announcement/Call for Participants

Subject: Call for 3rd/4th Grade RASD Participants [from Cole Reilly]

Dear ____________,

CALL FOR 3rd and/or 4th GRADE TEACHER-PARTICIPANTS: I'm conducting a research study that focuses upon read-alouds and conversations around read-alouds. What I am looking to do is collect video data from a sample of third grade teachers (each with no less than two years experience teaching that third grade in SCASD already) who agree to participate. I intend to observe and videotape a series of four 20-30 minute classroom read-aloud sessions facilitated by each interested volunteer between now and the end of the 2007-2008 school year; I will do my best to work around teachers’ schedules and availability.

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS: I will provide an assortment of developmentally appropriate children's books (from which each volunteer may choose) for conducting these read-aloud. As an added incentive, I will purchase on behalf of the participating teachers/classrooms any two books (of the respective teacher’s choice) from the collection I provide OR a $25 gift card to a book store of his/her choosing.

REFLECTION: Upon the completion of the series of scheduled read-alouds and brief mini-reflections, I would like to schedule one 30-45 minute debriefing interview session (probably some day before/after school or during a lunch break, etc) with each participant. I’d like to use this time to allow each participant to comment on what s/he may have noticed in the video footage (or in the moment itself, while conducting these read-alouds) and to add anything else that may or may not have been captured on the video.

GETTING BACK TO ME ASACP: Please let me know if you are willing to participate. I have a more detailed consent form for participants to sign and I am happy to clarify any specific questions you may have. I welcome all qualifying 3rd grade teacher-volunteers to participate; however, at the suggestion of my committee, as well as the necessity of available time, I anticipate randomly selecting no more than three such participants (of those who volunteer) for the actual research study.

Respectfully yours,

Cole Reilly
Professional Development Associate
Penn State University-SCASD PDS Partnership

P.S.: Although the camera will be focused on the teacher, from above behind the 3rd grade students, ideally I am looking for volunteers who either have parental/guardian consent for each of their students to be filmed, etc. or can help me arrange (e.g., camera angles, seating) to prevent students for whom we do not have consent from predictably appearing within any footage.
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form (Signed by Teachers, Initialed by Principals)

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research  IRB# 23404
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Re-Reading Read-Alouds: Exploring Discourse and Pedagogical Conversations around Children’s Books

Principal Investigator: Cole Reilly
163 Chambers Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 441-4611; czr114@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. J. Dan Marshall
204E Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-2239; jdm13@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore how elementary teachers perform read-alouds with/for their students.

2. Procedures to be followed: Each participant will be videotaped separately for four 20-30 minute sessions, as s/he facilitates selected read-alouds with/for his/her class. Within the 24 hours following each read-aloud session, each participant will be responsible for recording (via text-, audio-, or video file reflection– it’s up to them) him-/herself briefly reflecting upon the lesson. After collecting the data from all the participant’s set of four read-alouds and four mini-reflections, the researcher will share each of these data files with each participant via CD, asking him/her to member-check and/or revisit the related data within a week’s time, before conducting the scheduled one 30-45 minute follow-up interview session. The researcher will also video record each of culminating interviews, sharing that as a video file with each participant as well before beginning to analyze the data.

3. Benefits: This research might provide a better understanding of the performative aspects and experience of elementary teachers facilitating read-alouds with/for their students. Participation in this study may introduce participants to new or unfamiliar texts to consider for read-alouds as well as new ways to look at familiar texts. The experience of getting to reflect upon and watch themselves perform read-alouds (as well as to respond to the overall series of read-aloud and mini-reflection experiences) may offer participants a new perspective upon how they approach read-alouds in the future.

4. Compensation: Two other incentives to participate in this study are that each participant will receive a copy of their respective data collection files for further reflection as well as two children’s books (or a $25 gift card to a bookstore) of their choice, which the principal
investigator has agreed to purchase.

5. **Duration:** It will take approximately 20-30 minutes for each (of four) read-aloud(s), 3-10 minutes for each (of four) mini-reflection(s), and 30-45 minutes for each final interview.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Each volunteer’s participation in this research is confidential. The research data will be stored and secured at the principal investigator’s residence, 2013 Mary Ellen Lane, State College, PA 16803 in a locked file box and electronic data will be password protected. Other than the personalized CD files of participants’ read-aloud, mini-reflection, and final interview files (which each respective participant will receive for his/her own records), investigators Cole Reilly and Dr. J. Dan Marshall will have the only access to this information. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. The investigators agree to destroy the tapes from these interviews by 2015.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Participants may ask questions or voice concerns about this research at any time by contacting Cole Reilly via email at czr114@psu.edu or by telephone at (814) 441-4611.

8. **Voluntary Permission:** Each participant’s decision to be in this research is voluntary. S/he can stop at any time. S/he does not have to answer any questions s/he does not wish to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please indicate so, sign your name, and provide the date below. [You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.]

_____ I **give** my permission to be VIDEO taped.

_____ I **do not give** my permission to be VIDEO taped.

__________________________________________  ____________________
Participant Signature  Date

__________________________________________  ____________________
Cole Reilly (Researcher)  Date
Appendix E

Data Collection Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
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| Between the months of May and August, 2008 | • I sent out email to all third grade teacher in RASD, inviting them to participate in my study.  
  • I obtained necessary permissions from teacher-participants, building principals, and the RASD school board. |
| During September of 2008           | • I used random-sampling (color-coded names in a hat) to narrow my pool of volunteers to three potential participants  
  • I distributed gender-themed bins and collect survey rakings of books within 24 hours of bin drop-off  
  • I decided to collect data in all three classes, and finalized which books from my bin of nine, they would each be reading  
  • I distributed and collected all necessary parent/guardian permission slips for students who would be a part of the study  
  • I scheduled the first two read-alouds for each participant |
| During October and November, 2008  | • I videotaped all read-aloud data and collected each respective reflections  
  • I eliminated my third participant from this study, for reasons of audio equipment failure, narrowing my participant cases to just a pair.  
  • I distribute data CDs (prior to Fall Break) and scheduled follow-up interviews |
| Between Fall and Winter Break, 2008 | • I conducted all interviews and began transcribing my data. |
Appendix F

Interview Outline and Design for Each Participant

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW WITH “FERN TAYLOR”

Cole: Fern, I am really glad you made time to sit down with me for this follow-up interview today. To be clear, it will not be a matter of providing “right” or “wrong” answers to any of my questions – your perspective is what I am after today. I want to thank you (again) for your flexibility in coordinating dates with me (to meet after school) and I am excited to hear some of the insight you can offer my study.

Having said all that, and because I respect your time, I have prepared a collection of questions and prompts for us today; we may not get through all of them but I may, at times, try to move us along to other questions as needed to get the most I can out of our 45-60 minutes together today.

Just to situate things for you, my specific research interests focus primarily upon the actual discussions – in other words, the interactions and exchanges that play out in dialog between students and/or the teacher – in reference to a children’s book (or tangent) during read-alouds. I am especially interested in the process of making meaning of the text (and of larger relevant themes inspired by the text) as members of a class talk with one another. I guess you could say I hope to collect some of your memories today – your memories and interpretations of these kinds of events.

PART 1: PARTICIPANT-TEACHER GETS TAKES THE LEAD BRIEFLY

Before I dive into some of my more directive questions, I thought I should ask you …

1. As you think back over the four read-alouds you let me record, does anything come to mind for you that you want to bring to my attention?
   a. [Follow Up Prompt (As Needed): Having revisited your reflections as well as watching the video footage of the read-alouds themselves, are there any salient remarks, patterns, connections, new ideas, perspectives, points of interest, or developments you might wish to share with me?]
PART 2: GENERIC READ-ALOUD QUESTIONS [PRELIMINARY IMPRESSIONS]

2. Did you perceive any noteworthy differences between these four read-alouds (i.e., the discussions around them) and your typical classroom read-alouds? If so, what was it/were they?
   a. Any noteworthy differences among the set of four read-aloud episodes?
   b. Any noticeable differences between the first (free-choice) book you read-aloud, *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* and the other three from my collection of books [*The Paper Bag Princess*, *The Princess Knight*, and *Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare*] you read-aloud?

3. What was it about these books and read-aloud discussions you believe students found most and/or least engaging? How could you tell?
   a. Did some students seem to enjoy any of the books differently than others (in your estimation)? If so, how could you tell and why? [Did you?]
   b. How did their discussions around the books compare with what you had anticipated when you initially ranked and selected each?

4. Talk to me about how it felt for you to be videotaped for these read-alouds?
   a. You mentioned being flustered at one point and that you may have handled behavior management differently (to some degree) because of the camera. Can you tell me more about this? Did this change over the course of the study? If so, how?
   b. I’m curious how much you may have felt you needed to “perform/act” any differently during any of the read-alouds we videotaped.
   c. Might the camera’s presence have colored or affected the dialog and discussion (for you and/or students) around the books? If so, how?

5. You mentioned noticing a number of atypical behaviors among your students [individually and/or as a whole] throughout the series of read-alouds. To what do/would you attribute these noteworthy changes? How might these irregularities have colored or affected the dialog and discussions/interactions around any of the given books? Please explain.

6. Based upon what surfaced in the discussions themselves (or any classroom talk/exchanges since then), with which characters, situations, and/or topics (across all of the books) did you get the sense the students identified most throughout the series of books? Least? What could you tell? How does the way they discuss some of the characters, situations, and/or topics differ (from one another)?

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PART 3: SITUATED HIGHLIGHTING QUESTIONS [RE: SEPARATE EPISODES]

7. At one point you asked the students what they thought of when they picture a princess. Another day you asked them “what’s a knight?” I’m curious what aspects of the students’ answers you did and/or did not anticipate? Was there anything more you perhaps anticipated hearing but didn’t?
   a. Among the many descriptors students mentioned, what might the implications be for any of these answers you might wish to comment upon?
      • [e.g. PRINCESS = nice dress – a pink dress, like what you might wear to prom – nice shoes, nice and clean --- not dirty, nice crown, nice girl, young girl, pretty girl, a pink dress, rich (with jewelry), pristine, and like a Disney Princess (Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella)]
      • [e.g., KNIGHT = dressed in armor, jousting, warriors, fight bad guys, usually in fairytales but also real too]
   b. You describe Princess Elizabeth as “quite different from most princesses” – could I ask you to elaborate on what you mean by this?

8. Sometimes it’s curious that the students notice certain details (e.g., Ronald’s tennis racket) in the books, yet (based upon what they were saying) seemed perhaps less aware of other key aspects or conflicting ideas in the text. Across the series of read-alouds, were there times when you found this to be true? What (if anything) did you notice that perhaps some of them appeared to miss or confuse? [Anything that I may have missed as well?]
   a. Several comments suggest a number of students thought Elizabeth would somehow get her dress back from the dragon [when he had clearly burned it off her and it seems unlikely that he either 1) had more to offer her or 2) could make some himself, although this too was suggested]; in fact, this seemed to be of greater focus to many of the students – that she was primarily motivated to get her/a dress back, presumably more so than to rescue Ronald.
   b. There was little regard for the consequences of a burned up castle/kingdom nor for all the forests the dragon destroyed showing off for Elizabeth. I’m curious, for instance, what Elizabeth and Ronald each have to go home to (albeit separately) at the tale’s end.
   c. Someone suggest Richie hurt Paul LeBlanc on purpose in order to get the solo.

9. Talk to me more about what you noticed with regard to your students’ participation levels throughout the series of read-alouds. I believe you mentioned they were especially high at some points; when was this the case? To what would you attribute such heightened and/or diminished levels of participation?
   a. You mentioned noticing (across all the read-alouds) that the students who sit toward the back participate less than those who sit in the front or middle. Is there anything else you notice about who sits where or how these students participate and interact with one another (or non-pattern/outliers even)? Do any students come to mind especially in this regard? [e.g., Lia and Mac]

10. You mentioned noticing a clear gender-divide in the students’ responses to your initial survey question, “Which is harder, ballet or hockey?”] Did this surprise you? Have there been other times when you’ve noticed something like this? Talk to me
PART 4: STRUCTURAL OVERLAPS [RE: INTERSECTING EPISODES]

11. [INFLUENCE-RECURRING THEMES BUILD UPON ONE ANOTHER] Looking back across the four read-alouds, I’m curious if there were times when you felt/sensed the reading and/or discussion of one book was some how spilling into, affecting, or otherwise coming into conversation with another. If so, please elaborate on this.

12. [MARRIAGE] I couldn’t help but notice there were a number of interesting exchanges that unfolded (primarily among the students) with regard to notions of marriage (and/or romantic relationships) in a number of the books [specifically, The Boy of the Three-Year Nap, The Paper Bag Princess, and The Princess Knight]—not just in this classroom. Could you perhaps speak to what (if anything) you recall about these interactions? Were there any remarks or ideas you found to be worthy of comment? Any inconsistencies, contradictions, surprises, problems, or provocative comments that stand out in your mind?
   a. For instances, the discussion around Violetta’s wish to have a say in who she marries seemed to stand in direct contrast to any such reaction to the prospect of the arranged marriage in The Boy of the Three-Year Nap. There, the merchant’s daughter’s opinion/consent were of no consequence to the marriage negotiations among the other characters. Why do you think the reactions were so different?

13. [CLOTHING] It seemed to me, and this goes beyond just what I heard in one classroom, but I noticed some recurring topics of discussion focusing upon what people/characters wear. I wonder if you’ve noticed this. Looking back across the four read-alouds, where/why might clothing/dress have been of particular interest?

14. [THINKING/FEELING] At times, the children were called upon to share what they thought different characters might be thinking and/or feeling. I’m curious if you might elaborate upon which comments or perspectives [right, wrong, or otherwise] come to mind most for you as particularly interesting in this regard? Were there any distinguishable differences you noticed about how students (or even you) interpreted characters’ feelings as opposed to what they were thinking?
15. [Vocabulary/Concepts] At different times throughout the series of books, I notice (and you mentioned this as well in your reflections) you often select certain words or terms to highlight as vocabulary. When you do so, what tends to inspire this focus? How much of this is planned versus impromptu? How often do you find yourself doing this instead with general concepts, rather than words, where you expect something is familiar to most of the students but are curious with regard to how they have come to make sense of it? Can you provide any such examples?

16. [Giving Away the Story] When you realize some students have read a book before [for instance, I remember you remarked that several of the students had apparently read The Paper Bag Princess before and it seemed ALL of the students had read The Princess Knight] how does that affect how you facilitate a read-aloud with it? How do you think it affects the way they (those students) re-read/re-hear the text and/or how they participate in the discussion?
   a. When Ellen “gave away” what would happen [in terms of how Elizabeth would defeat the dragon in The Paper Bag Princess], what do you think she was thinking? Given that Ellen had promised earlier “Don’t worry; I won’t tell.” What do you suspect motivated her to do this (anyway)? [ Might she have thought there was a different part not to divulge (e.g., the tale ending).]
   b. What did you make of the exchange between Joel and Lia with regard to the rose-gardener’s son ending in The Princess Knight? [After Joel gave away the ending, he calls out “Yay for me!” when his ‘prediction’ comes true. Lia retorts “Yay for you? Yay for the rose gardener’s son!”]

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PART 5: GENERIC THEMES EMERGING [CONCLUDING IMPRESSIONS]

17. Given that at least one of the other participating teachers in this study selected each of these books [The Paper Bag Princess, The Princess Knight, and Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare] to read-aloud in her classroom as well, how do you imagine your facilitation of each of these texts might differ from how such read-alouds may likely play out in another third or fourth grade classroom?

18. How might you have approached any of these individual read-alouds (or the group of four together) differently with...
   a. a different class?
   b. during a different time of year?
   c. with these same children were you to be able to go back in time and redo any of these read-alouds (knowing what you know now)?

19. What messages did you want student to take away from any of these books? What messages do you think they did take away (as these may differ) and what interactions/exchanges (during or since these read-alouds) lead you to infer such connections were or were not made?

20. You say you found it interesting that one of your students picked up on stereotypes (relating the tennis racket with images of wealth). The topic of stereotypes came up in
an interesting way in your classroom. Based upon their discussions in these or other read-alouds, etc., which stereotypes do students seem most aware of and reject as “just stereotypes” (not true) as compared with any some of them might accept as “fact.” How can you tell?

21. What ideas or attitudes about gender (if any) do you believe surfaced across these read-alouds and/or accompanying discussions. Do you sense that any such notions of gender were Affirmed?/Challenged? Revised? Ignored by one or more of your students’ thinking? That challenged your own thinking? Did any of the books especially lend themselves to provocative discussion of gender? If so, which ones and why?
   a. In all the talk about princesses, the conversation turned to Disney princesses when Jake commented on his four-year-old brother’s affinity for Cinderella? In the moment, it looked as though you almost wanted to say something but didn’t; as I remember it, none of the other students commented on this either. Can you tell me about this?

22. In your initial reflections, you’ve told me quite a bit about references students made to these books well after the read-alouds. Do you have any related updates to share in this regard (that I would have missed)?
   a. How typical is it for your students to make reference to or make explicit connections to the books you read-aloud hours or days later? How might you compare and contrast the reference students made to The Princess Knight (a day later) to what you shared about the students comment about “I’m The Paper Bag Princess” on the afternoon of the day you read that book?

23. What percentage of/how often do you pair your read-alouds with a specific follow-up activity? What informs/inspires you to do this (or not) with any given read-aloud? What strategies do you find to be most and least successful in this regard?

24. What other contextual factors (time of day, what happens just before/after) especially shape and/or affect the read-alouds? How are such factors reflected in the actual discussions?
FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW WITH “RACHEL PERKINS”

Cole: Rachel, I am really glad you made time to sit down with me for this follow-up interview today. To be clear, it will not be a matter of providing “right” or “wrong” answers to any of my questions – your perspective is what I am after today. I want to thank you (again) for your flexibility in coordinating dates with me (to meet after school) and I am excited to hear some of the insight you can offer my study.

Having said all that, and because I respect your time, I have prepared a collection of questions and prompts for us today; we may not get through all of them but I may, at times, try to move us along to other questions as needed to get the most I can out of our 45-60 minutes together today.

Just to situate things for you, my specific research interests focus primarily upon the actual discussions – in other words, the interactions and exchanges that play out in dialog between students and/or the teacher – in reference to a children’s book (or tangent) during read-alouds. I am especially interested in the process of making meaning of the text (and of larger relevant themes inspired by the text) during read-alouds. I am especially interested in the process of making meaning of the text (and of larger relevant themes inspired by the text) as members of a class talk with one another. I guess you could say I hope to collect some of your memories today – your memories and interpretations of these kinds of events.

PART 1: PARTICIPANT-TEACHER GETS TAKES THE LEAD BRIEFLY

Before I dive into some of my more directive questions, I thought I should ask you …

25. As you think back over the four read-alouds you let me record, does anything come to mind for you that you want to bring to my attention?
   a. [Follow Up Prompt (As Needed): Having revisited your reflections as well as watching the video footage of the read-alouds themselves, are there any salient remarks, patterns, connections, new ideas, perspectives, points of interest, or developments you might wish to share with me?]
PART 2: GENERIC READ-ALOUD QUESTIONS [PRELIMINARY IMPRESSIONS]

26. Did you perceive any noteworthy differences between these four read-alouds (i.e., the discussions around them) and your typical classroom read-alouds? If so, what was it/were they?
   a. Any noteworthy differences among the set of four read-aloud episodes?
   b. Any noticeable differences between the first (free-choice) book you read-aloud, Aani and the Tree Huggers and the other three from my collection of books [Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare, The Princess Knight, and The Sissy Duckling] you read-aloud?

27. What was it about these books and read-aloud discussions you believe students found most and/or least engaging? How could you tell?
   a. Did some students seem to enjoy any of the books differently than others (in your estimation)? If so, how could you tell and why? [Did you?]
   b. How did their discussions around the books compare with what you had anticipated when you initially ranked and selected each?

28. Talk to me about how it felt for you to be videotaped for these read-alouds?
   a. I’m curious how much you may have felt you needed to “perform/act” any differently during any of the read-alouds we videotaped.
   b. Might the camera’s presence have colored or affected the dialog and discussion (for you and/or students) around the books? If so, how?

29. You mentioned noticing a number of atypical behaviors among your students [individually and/or as a whole] throughout the series of read-alouds. To what do/would you attribute these noteworthy changes? How might these irregularities have colored or affected the dialog and discussions/interactions around any of the given books? Please explain.

30. Based upon what surfaced in the discussions themselves (or any classroom talk/exchanges since then), with which characters, situations, and/or topics (across all of the books) did you get the sense the students identified most throughout the series of books? Least? What could you tell? How does the way they discuss some of the characters, situations, and/or topics differ (from one another)?
PART 3: SITUATED HIGHLIGHTING QUESTIONS [RE: SEPARATE EPISODES]

31. At one point you asked the students what comes to mind when they hear the word “sissy.” I’m curious what aspects of the students’ answers you did and/or did not anticipate? Was there anything more you perhaps anticipated hearing but didn’t? Anything you were worried they might say?
   a. Among the many descriptors students mentioned, what might the implications be for any of these answers you might wish to comment upon?
      • [e.g., SISSY = scared of a lot of stuff, <flincher>, crybaby, being spoiled, soft?, selfish, cutesy, annoying – like my brother, “annoying is part of being a sissy – they’re always around you doing stuff that you don’t like sometimes” <others disagree>, Whiney like my sister, not sharing, Like a sister; if someone called you a sissy you’d feel bad]
      • “Would you look at this picture <the one where Elmer carries his injured father all by himself> and call him a sissy?”

32. Sometimes its curious that the students notice certain details (e.g., Ronald’s tennis racket) in the books, yet (based upon what they were saying) seemed perhaps less aware of other key aspects or conflicting ideas in the text. Across the series of read-alouds, were there times when you found this to be true? What (if anything) did you notice that perhaps some of them appeared to miss or confuse? [Anything that I may have missed as well?]
   a. As the students saw things, the switch was a disaster; Rachel saw it as a great success.

33. Talk to me more about what you noticed with regard to your students’ participation levels throughout the series of read-alouds. I believe you mentioned they were especially high at some points; when was this the case? To what would you attribute such heightened and/or diminished levels of participation?
   a. I know one of your goals this year is to encourage as many students as possible to participate as possible. How does this affect the nature of discussions in your class?

34. How do behavior issues potentially affect the discussion aspects of any given read-aloud? How does the potential for such situations to potentially occur affect your strategic approach to read-alouds in general? Talk to me about what seemed to be happening (in your mind as well, perhaps as in the minds of the children). How do YOU negotiate those conversations?

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PART 4: STRUCTURAL OVERLAPS [RE: INTERSECTING EPISODES]

35. [INFLUENCE-RECURRING THEMES BUILD UPON ONE ANOTHER] Looking back across the four read-alouds, I’m curious if there were times when you felt/sensed the reading and/or discussion of one book was some how spilling into, affecting, or otherwise coming into conversation with another. If so, please elaborate on this.

36. [MARRIAGE] I couldn’t help but notice there were a number of interesting exchanges that unfolded (primarily among the students) with regard to notions of marriage (and/or romantic relationships) in some of these books – not just in this classroom. Could you perhaps speak to what (if anything) you recall about these interactions? Were there any remarks or ideas you found to be worthy of comment? Any inconsistencies, contradictions, surprises, problems, or provocative comments that stand out in your mind?
   a. Were there any interesting points that came out about the loving relationships between parents and children, etc

37. [CLOTHING] It seemed to me, and this goes beyond just what I heard in one classroom, but I noticed some recurring topics of discussion focusing upon what people/characters wear. I wonder if you’ve noticed this. Looking back across the four read-alouds, where/why might clothing/dress have been of particular interest?

38. [THINKING/FEELING] At times, the children were called upon to share what they thought different characters might be thinking and/or feeling. I’m curious if you might elaborate upon which comments or perspectives [right, wrong, or otherwise] come to mind most for you as particularly interesting in this regard? Were there any distinguishable differences you noticed about how students (or even you) interpreted characters’ feelings as opposed to what they were thinking?
   a. You mentioned also thinking that the students seemed to struggle when feelings or thinking changed; tell me more about this.

39. [VOCABULARY/CONCEPTS] At different times throughout the series of books, I notice you often select certain words or terms to highlight as vocabulary. When you do so, what tends to inspire this focus? How much of this is planned versus impromptu? How often do you find yourself doing this instead with general concepts, rather than words, where you expect something is familiar to most of the students but are curious with regard to how they have come to make sense of it? Can you provide any such examples?

40. [GIVING AWAY THE STORY] When you realize some students have read a book before how does that affect how you facilitate a read-aloud with it? How do you think it affects the way they (those students) re-read/re-hear the text and/or how they participate in the discussion?

PART 5: GENERIC THEMES EMERGING [CONCLUDING IMPRESSIONS]
41. Given that at least one of the other participating teachers in this study selected each of these books [Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare, The Princess Knight, and The Sissy Duckling] to read-aloud in her classroom as well, how do you imagine your facilitation of each of these texts might differ from how such read-alouds may likely play out in another third or fourth grade classroom?

42. How might you have approached any of these individual read-alouds (or the group of four together) differently with…
   a. a different class?
   b. during a different time of year?
   c. with these same children were you to be able to go back in time and redo any of these read-alouds (knowing what you know now)?

43. What messages did you want student to take away from any of these books? What messages do you think they did take away (as these may differ) and what interactions/exchanges (during or since these read-alouds) lead you to infer such connections were or were not made?

44. The topic of stereotypes came up in an interesting way in your classroom. Based upon their discussions in these or other read-alouds, etc., which stereotypes do students seem most aware of and reject as “just stereotypes” (not true) as compared with any some of them might accept as “fact.” How can you tell?

45. What ideas or attitudes about gender (if any) do you believe surfaced across these read-alouds and/or accompanying discussions. Do you sense that any such notions of gender were affirmed? Challenged? Revised? Ignored by one or more of your students’ thinking? That challenged your own thinking? Did any of the books especially lend themselves to provocative discussion of gender? If so, which ones and why?
   a. You mentioned some ideas about gender differences and/or sexual preferences in one reflection. How do (or don’t) these things come up in discussions in school?

46. You mentioned sensing that there were some key differences between using unit-books primarily for read-alouds and selecting “special” books like these as your teaching tools. Can you tell me a bit more about this? What did you notice? How do this affect the kinds of discussions that take place?

47. What percentage of/how often do you pair your read-alouds with a specific follow-up activity? What informs/inspires you to do this (or not) with any given read-aloud? What strategies do you find to be most and least successful in this regard?

48. What other contextual factors (time of day, what happens just before/after) especially shape and/or affect the read-alouds? How are such factors reflected in the actual discussions?
## Appendix G

Demographic Statistics for RASD’s Elementary School Sites

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Site</th>
<th>Approx Distance from Center of POUC Campus (miles)</th>
<th>Total Number of Students Enrolled</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as Hispanic</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as Black</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as Native American or Alaska Native</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged</th>
<th>% of Students Identified as White</th>
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<tr>
<td>Roosevelt Area School Dist</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<td>Elementary Sites</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
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All data from School Matters (2008) [websites as of Standard and Poor’s](http://www.standardandpoors.com/). Standard & Poor’s, a Division of The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
Appendix H

Distinguishing Data Incidences that Qualify as Pedagogies of Gendering

In addition to providing the Venn diagram in Figure 5-1 as a representation of how I conceptualized pedagogies of gendering as made up of the intersections and overlaps between the gendering curricula and pedagogies of practice, I thought it may prove helpful to clarify what it meant (in a more practical sense) to distinguish such Studiocode data incidents using my two-part criteria. The image above represents a sample snapshot of how I used my five primary codes (gender personified, gender interacted, gendered regulated, pedagogical strategies of engagement, and pedagogical structures of instruction) to find those qualifying incidents of pedagogical gendering via Studiocode. To clarify, the citrus-colored horizontal lines correspond to each of the codes that comprise the gendering curricula, whereas the berry-colored lines reflect the two pedagogies of practice codes. The white line that runs between these two groupings represents pedagogies of gendering in that each clearly triggers one or more of the three codes above it and one or both of the pair below the line. Only those dual-qualifying incidents were interpreted as meeting the criteria I settled upon as pedagogies of gendering.
VITA

Cole Reilly

Education

The Pennsylvania State University • University Park, Pennsylvania
Ph.D., Curriculum & Instruction and Women’s Studies [Dual] 2009

Millersville University • Millersville, Pennsylvania
B.S.Ed., (K-6) Elementary Education and (K-12) Special Education [Dual] 1999

Teaching/Supervision Experience

Assistant Professor of Elementary Education 2009 – Present
Dept. of Elementary Education Ed., Towson University

Grad. Assist./Supplemental Instruction Supervisor/Project Assist. 2008 – 2009
University Learning Center (ULC), The Pennsylvania State University

College of Education, The Pennsylvania State University

K-5 Elem. Teacher/Enrichment/Gifted Program (DEEP) Coordinator 1999 – 2004
Downingtown Area School District [Shamona Creek Elementary School]

Selected Grants, Honors, & Recognitions

Towson University’s New Faculty Incentive Award/Grant 2009
Provost Office/College of Education /Dept of Elem. Education [$5,190.00 awarded]

The Pennsylvania State University

Excellence in Curricular Integration Appreciation Award 2009
College of Education Alumni Distinguished Graduate Scholarship 2008 – 2009
Nominee, Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award 2008
Holmes Scholar Volunteer of the Year Award 2007
Lambda Alumni Outstanding Student Award 2007
Nominee, Lambda Alumni Outstanding Student Award 2006
Eva Diefenderfer Graduate Fellowship 2005 – 2008

3E Institute, College of Education, West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Educator 500 Award Honoree 2004

Citadel’s Heart of Learning
Chester County Overall Elementary Teacher of the Year 2003
Downingtown Area School District Outstanding Teacher of the Year 2003