

Reexamining Roles of Learner, Text, and Context in Secondary Literacy

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The idea that literacy is a dynamic process, involving an interaction or transaction between a learner and a text situated in a particular context, has framed much of the research on reading and writing at the secondary level—Grades 7 through 12—over the last 30 years. In studies of secondary literacy, researchers have endeavored to understand the cognitive processes involved in reading and writing. Teaching and learning strategies based on those processes were developed to teach secondary learners to use reading and writing to learn information and to think critically in various disciplines (cf. Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1989; Tierney & Pearson, 1992a). Those attempts to understand how features of text and disciplinary or classroom contexts might influence the reader's or writer's cognitive processes have been tremendously influential in the field; educators have come to understand that learning in the secondary disciplines—or content areas—is shaped by the reading and writing that learners do in those disciplines. Moreover, reading and writing in the disciplines is shaped by the unique conceptual, textual, and semantic demands of each area; for example, reading and writing historical narrative is different from reading and writing scientific exposition. Thus, the field of secondary literacy has developed with an emphasis on examining how various content areas employ different kinds of texts and make different cognitive demands on learners.

The introduction of sociocultural and critical perspectives from psychology, anthropology, and sociology has complicated the secondary literacy research agenda in recent years (O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 1995). In addition to the textual and cognitive demands that are made on readers and writers in various content areas, secondary literacy educators have begun to examine the social and cultural demands made of readers and writers. Scholars in the 1980s and 1990s began to examine the interactions among learners and teachers in secondary classrooms (Bloome, 1989; Dillon, 1989; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Moje, 1996; Myers, 1992; Santa Barbara Discourse Group, 1994; Stewart, 1990; Sturtevant, 1996). Although those interactions often are framed by and reflect disciplinary contexts, teachers' and learners' beliefs and ways of knowing and doing outside of the content also are considered to be important aspects of literacy learning and use.

The constructs of learner, text, and context remain important, but they have been broadened as secondary literacy scholars have turned increasingly to social and cultural perspectives on literacy. In a revision of their earlier perspective, Tierney and Pearson (1992b), for example, described *texts* as multiple and intertextual; *readers* as having more central roles in the process of constructing reading; and *contexts* as critical to shaping meaning making. Tierney and Pearson's revised view of comprehension highlights a broadened and more complicated stance on literacy teaching and learning. We want to extend that stance by arguing that, as we move into the next millennium, learners, texts, and contexts will be even more diverse, multiple, and shifting than Tierney and Pearson envisioned in 1992. Technological innovations have brought different groups of people into closer contact and have provided more people with easy and rapid access to information (Bruce, 1997). Individuals can move easily from one context into a vastly different context in a matter of minutes (even seconds if one operates in "cyber-contexts"), and this movement requires that individuals learn multiple ways of knowing and being. The realization that literacy is a complex process and practice necessitates that literacy educators acknowledge that one cannot assume a neat, linear perspective on literacy processes or tidy solutions to the complexities of classroom practice.

Our goal in this article was to present and discuss the complexities of secondary school literacy learners, texts, and contexts and to draw implications for classroom practice in the new millennium. We drew from a series of studies of secondary and adolescent learners' literacies in school and out of school, and in a variety of content areas. The studies that we drew upon vary in research questions and theoretical lenses, but all employ qualitative or interpretive methods to explore the complexities of secondary literacy teaching and learning. For example, some of our earlier research focused on teachers' beliefs and practices by examining how they make decisions about content, literacy, and the social organization of their classrooms. We also studied teachers' and learners' interactions and how those interactions shape their literacy practices and the social organization of classrooms. Recently, we focused on individual learners' beliefs and practices, how those are shaped

by in-school and out-of-school experiences and contexts, and how individual practices shape classroom teaching and learning practices. Throughout those studies, we examined how issues of difference and power shape literacy teaching and learning practices in schools. The theoretical perspectives that informed and grounded our research are explained in the following section.

Theoretical Perspectives on Literacy

We view all literacy events as situated in relationships with other people (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Brandt, 1990; Volosinov, 1973). Literacy events are acts or moments that involve reading, writing, speaking, and performing many kinds of texts, but these acts or moments are situated in specific social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts and are engaged in for specific purposes relative to those contexts (cf. Barton, 1994; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Moreover, the meanings people make of texts and of literacy events are contextualized by the social networks or communities and historical and cultural arrangements in which persons live, work, and play (cf. Bakhtin, 1986; Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole; Street, 1984; Volosinov, 1973). As a result, persons bring particular ways of reading, writing, speaking, and performing to different literacy events; these ways of engaging in literacy events have been referred to as *practices* by various theorists (Barton, 1991, 1994; Scribner & Cole; Street, 1984). Literacy (and other) practices are constructed as persons draw from what Gee (1996) called *discourses*—ways of “thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting” (p. 131)—that persons use to identify and position themselves and others as members of social groups. Because literacy practices are shaped by discourses, literacy can be considered a powerful tool that can be used to claim a space or establish an identity or voice in various social interactions. The ways one uses literacy can have a profound impact on whether a particular literacy event, and its concomitant practice, is valued (Barton, 1994; Gee; Graff, 1987; Street, 1994).

In addition to those perspectives, the constructs of learner, text, and context have been important to the field of literacy as researchers moved from a focus on decoding individual words toward understanding literacy as a process of making meaning. As we have indicated previously, however, understandings of the learner, the text, and the context have changed dramatically in recent years and promise to continue to change. We explore these constructs in the next section of this research.

The Learner

Erickson and Schultz (1992) noted that very little educational research has focused on learners, including an integrated examination of social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of their experiences. Even in studies describing learners' and teachers' work in classrooms, these “slices of

classroom life have not been multidimensional enough to capture learners' subjective worlds as whole phenomena” (p. 466). In the field of literacy, Vacca (1998) and others noted that one needs to understand adolescents and what they think about literacy. Several issues are important to consider when trying to understand learners' experiences and perspectives.

First, we often lump learners into a one-dimensional mold called individual, or we classify them in a group with all members having the same characteristics. Instead, one needs to understand the learner as a person with multiple identities: an individual that is at one moment a daughter; in another instant, a girlfriend; a disengaged learner in chemistry class; and a focused learner in psychology class (cf. Dillon & Moje, 1998).

When one acknowledges that persons perform or enact many different identities, then he or she must ask how these identities are constructed and represented. *Identities* (whether considered to be singular or multiple and shifting) can be understood by examining the ways that persons are positioned in social interactions. Those positionings, or subject positions, are shaped by relations within and across contexts. For example, the learner who is positioned as bright and capable in an English class may be similarly positioned in science class or may be positioned as struggling and slow. Positionings are shaped by differences among persons, such as differences in race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, language use, and religious preference. How one is positioned and how one positions oneself contributes to the construction of one's *subjectivity/ies*, or the values, preferences, and beliefs one holds about a particular idea or practice (New London Group, 1996). Subject positions also shape and reflect how people identify themselves or are identified by others. The constructs of identity/ies and subjectivity/ies are important in literacy and language research because the ways young people use literacy and language can influence how they are positioned as well as their access to further literacy and language learning.

Second, one needs to understand that learners' multiple identities and subjectivities are created in and through both social and academic discourses (Gee, 1996). As learners engage in different practices in school and in the world outside of school, they occupy many subject positions depending on the context they are in or what they believe others expect of them. For example, within various contexts learners take on or are assigned by others identities and subject positions; contexts also determine whether certain subject positions are restricted or encouraged. Moreover, learners who interact with each other “construct intertextual relationships by the ways they act and react to each other” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 311). These intersubjective relations assume that when learners interact with one another that those who talk and those who listen have a relationship in which each desires that the other is understood (Usher & Edwards, 1994). Looking at the discourse that

occurs in various contexts and examining the identities and subject positions of learners as they interact is particularly critical in secondary literacy research because it is through language that individuals' personal and social identities are recognized and maintained. Specifically, persons judge and position one another often by the language they speak (Stubbs, in Meek 1983, p. x) and by the ways they read and write. Coupled with our examination of learners' discourses, multiple identities, and subject positions is the need to look at the gendered, raced, and classed nature of these interactions; specifically, how language shapes, limits, and makes possible certain worlds (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997; Brantlinger, 1993; Davies, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Weis, 1990).

The Text

The traditional definition of text within the field of content literacy is printed text. Using textbooks and related learning materials, researchers have focused on the study of text comprehension. In recent years, the construct of text has been broadened beyond the notion of print by scholars outside of reading and writing to include philosophers and literary theorists. According to Derrida (1976, 1982), for example, a *text* is any organized network of meaning and includes the system of cultural signs, inscriptions, and grammars that shape both speech and writing. Like Barthes (1977/1996) and Eco (1983), Derrida also asserted that texts are more than linguistic artifacts. He argued that persons (or selves) are texts that can be read, written, and deconstructed. Whereas the *interactive* (cf. Rumelhart, 1984) and *transactive* (cf. Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978) models of reading examine the texts' relationship to the reader, Derridean perspectives imply that the *self* is a text and is shaped by the play of multiple texts; with every attempt to assign meaning to a text, a new text emerges.

Within the field of literacy, Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) argued that "What counts as text cannot be determined outside of the situation itself" (p. 311). According to that perspective, text is a social construction, something that is agreed upon by persons acting and interacting in social settings, or what Bloome and Egan-Robertson refer to as "textualizing." In writing about her work in the Piedmont communities of North Carolina, Heath (1994) also defined texts as social constructions: "Talk, as well as talk about talk, nonverbal reinforcements of spoken and written language, written artifacts, and the activities and role regulations that frame all of these become the texts that those who study language socialization attempt to study" (p. 213). Texts, according to this perspective, are more than sites of information or aesthetic expression; they are cultural tools for establishing belongingness, identity (cf. Gee, 1996), personhood (cf. Street, 1994), and ways of knowing. In those perspectives, the researchers argued that who persons are as subjects is shaped by textual and discursive processes in which stories are told about and by persons to position

others as good or bad, important or unimportant; the construction of texts is a part of this positioning of self and others (Luke, 1995/1996). Thus, texts are more than linguistic, print-based artifacts, and they serve and reflect social purposes. Uses of text have important implications for identity and for how contexts are defined.

The Context

Context has been defined as a research construct in a number of different ways by various scholars (cf. Moore, 1996; Rex, Green, Dixon; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1998). For example Goodwin and Duranti (1992) defined context as a frame that encompasses an event and provides resources for its interpretation. In the secondary literacy literature, context has been used to describe an element or aspect of the literacy process (e.g., picture context clues), and has typically been thought of as the learner's immediate surroundings. Studies that have acknowledged context often focus on how aspects of classroom contexts (everything from the mode of instruction to the physical layout of the classroom) shape purposes for and meanings made from reading or writing. Such analyses have been useful to illustrate the complex nature of literacy processes. In those studies however, researchers have not analyzed the myriad of other contexts that learners move through in their everyday lives. Our recent work has operated from the premise that family, community, and peer-group contexts matter even when learners are not immediately engaged in them. What one knows, does, or learns in one's family or church, for example, is not forgotten simply because one is situated in a classroom or school context. Moreover, contexts do not have neat boundaries and cannot be easily defined (cf. Moore, 1996). A *context* can be an event, a place, a social group, a realm of knowledge, or a moment in time. And finally, contexts have dramatic implications for shaping and reflecting learners' identities and subject positions, as well as particular interpretations of texts.

Research Perspectives

In the remaining sections of this article, we analyzed and interpreted data drawn from three qualitative—interpretive studies that we conducted. The studies have been framed by symbolic interactionism (cf. Blumer, 1969) and by work done in the field of cultural studies (cf. Fiske, 1989; Grossberg, 1995). *Symbolic interactionism* suggests that one defines situations and negotiates meanings on the basis of his or her interpretation of symbols while engaged in interactions with other human beings and asserts, as its methodological imperative, that researchers study the lived world of human interaction. According to the methodological principles of symbolic interactionism, each of the three studies involved intensive data collection in schools and out of schools over extended periods of time (1 to 3 years). We collected data in

the form of observations, formal and informal interviews with teachers and learners, audiotaping and videotaping of lessons and other interactions, and learner artifacts created in various contexts. We analyzed data using analytic induction techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990) and discourse analysis techniques (Gee, 1996; Kress, 1989; Lemke, 1990; Luke 1995/1996). Because symbolic interactionism focuses on interactions, we each collected data that allowed us to examine closely interactions between teachers and learners and between learners and learners both in school and out of school. We also needed to gain in-depth understandings of the ways in which study participants defined their situations (cf. Blumer, 1967) or contexts. With a sense of how participants defined their contexts, we then analyzed field notes and videotape and audiotape data of their interactions within those contexts.

Cultural studies perspectives also suggest that it is important to study the everyday lives of persons in a particular cultural context to understand and help them make positive change in their lives. However, in contrast to symbolic interactionism, research in cultural studies places a special emphasis on understanding how everyday practices (or micro-relations) both shape and reflect broader social practices (or macro-relations). In addition, the cultural studies focus on practices is significantly different from that of the symbolic interactionism focus on interactions because it does not emphasize making sense of a participant's actions in light of specific interactions, although it does focus on the micro-processes of everyday life. Thus, our reliance on cultural studies perspectives necessitated in-depth interviewing and ethnographic observation. In each study, we conducted lived experience interviews (cf. van Manen, 1990) and spent time collecting data on the everyday, in-school and out-of-school practices of the participants. Another difference between symbolic interactionism and cultural studies is that cultural studies examine links between the micro- and macro-relations. As a result, we collected data on the larger structural and discursive contexts in which the participants lived and worked. For example, the first author used interviews and content analysis of media texts to study the surrounding contexts of school and district—Salt Lake City, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, and the learners' neighborhoods and ethnic communities. Similarly, the second and third authors each studied those contexts in Lafayette and West Lafayette, Indiana to situate in larger social, cultural, and political contexts what they were learning about the participants and classrooms.

In the remainder of this article, we present three cases that exemplify a range of contexts, learners, and texts. We examined disciplinary, classroom, and broad social contexts, as well as different learners, teachers, families, and community members using multiple texts. In our Conclusion, we used our findings to frame implications and questions for literacy researchers to consider as we move into the next millennium.

Examining the Learner, Text, and Context: Three Case Studies

In the next section, Moje used the constructs of learner, text, and context to analyze data drawn from her 3-year study of the literacy practices of learners in a large, urban school district in Salt Lake City, Utah. The study, which began in a seventh-grade English classroom, followed the learners in school and out of school through ninth grade. Specifically, Moje analyzes how various cultural contexts shaped who one learner was and how she read and wrote classroom texts. The vignette that Moje presents was composed from field notes, interviews, and artifactual data.

How Context Constructs the Learner and the Text: The Case of Khek

The learner in this case was a young woman who asked to be called by the pseudonym Khek. At the time of the study, Khek was 12 years of age; she identified her ethnicity as Laos. Khek, her parents, and an older brother and sister had left Laos for Thailand when Khek was 5 years of age. The family lived in Thailand for approximately 2 years before emigrating to the United States. Although Khek and her siblings spoke fluent English, Khek's parents spoke little English. The family lived in a two-bedroom apartment in an area of Salt Lake City commonly referred to as "Little Saigon." Khek's parents each worked two jobs during the 1st year of the study; in subsequent years, they reduced their workload to one job each. In the last year, Khek's parents separated, leaving Khek to live in the apartment with her father and her sister. As a result of the separation, Khek often was alone in the apartment late into the night because her father worked an evening shift.

In the following excerpt of classroom data, the primary text is a novel titled *The Cage* (Sender, 1988). In this story, a young Jewish woman and her siblings struggle for survival in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II. The class read the novel aloud, with discussion of key ideas and issues held at teacher-determined stopping points or when learners asked questions. As follow-up to the class reading, the teacher asked learners to write responses that focused on how they felt about specific events in the story and on what they would do if they were the main character. The teacher also used excerpts of the movie "Schindler's List" to present learners with visual images of the events they read about in *The Cage*, but the movie was not discussed in depth. While conducting the reader's workshop of *The Cage*, the teacher also held a writer's workshop for the last half of the period each day, and she often used the narrative devices of *The Cage* and other texts as examples during mini-lessons. Because the writer's workshop occurred simultaneously with the reader's workshop, Khek's writings, conferences, and conversations can also be considered texts in this data set. Finally, all learners were asked to choose a novel to read silently on Fridays; the free-choice

novels can also be considered as texts in the classroom, although these texts did not figure prominently in the whole-class literacy activities.

My interest in Khek was piqued from the first day she arrived in class (3 days after school began) because she seemed unsure of herself or of what she should do in this class where one could write in any way about any thing. I had many opportunities to observe Khek in interaction with other learners, but I began to work with her as a focus participant in my study because of her interactions in a small writing group early in the year. As the group worked to revise a section of a story produced by the teacher (as part of a whole-class revision mini-lesson), Khek contributed very little, except to make comments such as, "Yeah, that's all we're putting. We're not very smart" when the group stopped to reread the revisions they had made. I also observed that Khek had "tagged" (a gang-related writing practice similar to graffiti) her hand with street gang names and signs; she responded to my naive question about the writing on her hands by saying "It's not tagging, you can't get me trouble cause it's my body, it's not school property." Khek's moves to define herself as "not smart" and to identify herself—at least to her peers—as "down with" a gang led me to observe her closely, with a special focus on the various subject positions she assumed and literacy practices she enacted in different contexts.

Approximately one fourth of the way through our reading of *The Cage*, I noted that Khek appeared not to be engaged during whole-class readings and discussions. At times she wrote notes or doodled on a piece of paper; at other times she simply slumped in her chair, glancing infrequently at the book as others read. When she was chosen by another learner to read aloud, she read fluently, but with no expression and in a barely audible voice.

On one occasion, Khek seemed particularly disenchanted with the novel and resistant to both reading and writing. Khek was then absent for the week following that incident. When I queried the teacher about Khek's absence, she responded that she thought Khek was "just blowing off class." However, upon Khek's return to class, I learned that she had been suspended for calling a teacher a "ho" because the teacher refused to lend her paper so that she could take notes in class. That incident occurred just prior to the class in which I had observed Khek's lack of participation. According to school policy, Khek was not allowed to return until her parents came to school to resolve the problem. Unfortunately, Khek's parents not only worked two jobs at the time, but also spoke little English. Her siblings spoke fluent English but were unable to advocate on her behalf.

Given those events, it is not surprising that Khek was not engaged in the reading of the novel or the writer's workshop that day. In the face of a school suspension, her immediate context, it was unlikely that the problems of a teenager from a distant past (the protagonist of *The Cage*) would have been particularly meaningful to Khek. Thus, the particular context of the school and specific events in another class

shaped the way Khek interacted with the text in the English classroom context. In addition, the context of the English class, in which learners sat in rows and read orally, with discussions designed to help them understand the flow of the narrative but not interpret the story or make connections to their lives, did little to connect the experiences of the protagonist with the experiences of a young woman like Khek. The context of the writer's workshop supported the writing of personal experience narratives like the novels they were reading, but it was clear from the data collected throughout the year that most learners had constructed what they deemed to be acceptable topics and formats for writings (Dressman, 1993; cf. Moje, Willes, & Fassio, in press; Willis, 1995). There was little in the classroom context to support writing about peer-group experiences (such as gang activities) or about cultural and community experiences.

Although the classroom and school context data explained Khek's reading and writing of the text on that particular day, they only partially addressed Khek's general lack of engagement throughout the reading and writing workshops. An examination of three other relevant contexts helped to shed light on Khek's reading and writing in the class. Those contexts included Khek's family, ethnicity, or culture; the dominant culture of the school and community; and the youth culture of which Khek was a member.

Although brought to the Salt Lake valley under the auspices of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (often referred to as the Mormon church), Khek's family had retained their Buddhist religion and their Laotian cultural practices. The Eurocentric practices of her school and community were not foreign or even uncomfortable for her, but in Khek's home Laotian cultural practices were followed. Laos was discussed as a primary topic of conversation, which generally occurred in Laotian, and Khek's parents were heavily involved in a Laotian community group that celebrated Laotian traditions and customs. Events such as the holocaust of World War II were not primary in the lives of Khek's family, but the wars in southeast Asia were central to them. Khek's family prominently displayed a portrait of Khek's father in military garb in their living room, together with a photograph of Khek in Laotian dress. Khek's parents felt their position as refugees from their homeland quite keenly, as indicated by their desire to return to Laos as soon as they could afford to. Thus, Khek's family and ethnic contexts did not provide her with experiences and perspectives that would resonate with the European perspectives represented in *The Cage*. Unlike the classroom teacher who stated that, "I was interested in World War II when I was 12," thus implying that all 12-year-olds should be equally interested, Khek had not been born just 17 years after World War II ended, nor did she live with a father who had fought in the war in Europe.

The teacher's comments, together with notes written in an electronic mail message, illustrate the dominant community and school culture, one in which White, middle-class, and European American experiences and values were

assumed. The following excerpt from one of Khek's teachers illustrates not only the teacher's perspective but also the dominant school and community perspective:

I guess when you tell me the truth about the girls not being engaged in *The Cage*, I take it personally. They're not engaged in writer's workshop or *The Cage*. They wouldn't be engaged in anything I've done in the past, either. None of the short stories I've done would move them, nor would *Little Tree* (*The Education of Little Tree* [Carter, 1976]) or any of the novels I have, nor would any of the writing activities or games or grammar or spelling or whatever. And yes, we can use grant money and check for kids' choice books. But honestly, can you picture Khek or Tricia [another disengaged learner] being thrilled about anything with school—any book, any writing, any activity, any assembly, any anything?

The teacher's comments illustrate a classroom context in which Khek's problems with engagement were seen as residing in her, rather than in the text or the pedagogy used in the class. The teacher's sense that nothing about school would move or thrill certain kids was echoed throughout the school and community context in the types of readings, activities, and experiences that were offered. The school and social culture rewarded mainstream practices and silenced or made invisible those learners whose practices did not fit the accepted standard. Khek said that:

They [the teachers] don't pick on, like to answer stuff, they don't pick on me. I'm sittin' there, yes, and every time like they would go down every row and I'd just sit there and act like I'm writin' on somethin' and I won't even be talkin', but they'll just like look away and say the next person's name.

It is not surprising, given this dominant practice of rendering problematic learners invisible, that Khek found it difficult to engage with the texts chosen by the teacher and that she found her most meaningful experiences rooted in another context, that of the youth street gang culture.

Khek's desire to become, as she said in a later interview, "part of the story" at the junior high school by engaging in street gang practices made it unlikely that she would make deep connections with the novel. The practices of that peer culture involved the construction of elaborate and sophisticated texts such as graffiti, personal notes, and poetry or rap lyrics. Those texts, however, served dynamic purposes in the lives of Khek and her friends. A seemingly simple text could signify identity and affiliation [with street gang practices], while it also communicated experiences, feelings, and values within the group (Moje, 1999).

The need to construct an identity independent of parents and family and to become part of a group is a well-documented aspect of adolescence (cf. Eccles et al., 1993). Like many of her peers, Khek was trying to decide who she was and wanted to become; her mind and body were occupied with the demands of identity construction and social interaction. She turned to gang affiliation (although she was not "jumped in" or initiated) and engaged actively in reading and writing gang scripts; those literacy practices allowed her to make meaning, communicate, and identify within a particular social group (cf. Moje, 1999; Moje, Thompson,

Christiansen, & Zeitler, 1997). Those textual practices were more powerful than a novel to which she could not connect or a writing program that would bring academic, but not social power. This analysis illustrates the different kinds of sociohistorical knowledge that Khek brought to her readings and writings of classroom text and offers a partial explanation for her lack of engagement or interest in the texts offered in the classroom. When viewed in a different context, with different texts, Khek—as learner—assumes a different subject position and, thus, a different identity as one engaged in literacy.

In the next section, Dillon uses the constructs of learner, text, and context to analyze data drawn from a year-long study of the social organization and literacy practices of learners in an academic-track biology class at Jefferson High School in Lafayette, Indiana. Jefferson is a large, comprehensive school that enrolled about 2,200 learners from families representing a range of socioeconomic levels and employment backgrounds. One focus of the study was to describe the literacy practices of learners as they engaged in group work on a daily basis (Dillon, O'Brien, & Volkman, in press). Specifically, Dillon et al. examined the literacy event of group work to determine how students used reading, writing, speaking, and performing to create or make sense of various texts (e.g., textbook, study guide) and learn biology concepts. The researchers also documented how various literacy events and the interactions therein were influenced by social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Of particular interest were the community practices or ways of doing literacy that students brought from home or out-of-school contexts and used within group work and the discourses that students used to position themselves and others as members within certain social groups. In the vignette that follows, Dillon analyzes how individual learners' gender and socioeconomic backgrounds influence how they positioned themselves and are positioned by others during group work, influencing what and how biology content is learned. The vignette was based on field notes, videotaped transcripts of group work, and interviews with one particular learner, Tina.

Positioning of the Learner Within the Context and the Text: The Case of Tina

I had the opportunity to know Tina by spending time with her during small-group work and during her lunch hours. Tina, a 15-year-old at the time of the study, was positioned as an average- to low-average ability learner in biology and was from a low-income family. When I met Tina she was experiencing a sense of awkwardness, bouts of acne, mood swings, and crushes on boys. She expressed a long-term goal of completing high school, attending college, and becoming a veterinarian. I found this career goal interesting because my first few interactions with Tina led me to believe that school was difficult for her and that her science class was not particularly interesting. Carolyn, a popular girl in her class, had expressed the desire to become a vet-

erinarian, so Tina might have been strongly influenced by Carolyn's ideas. During several conversations, Tina shared information about her family structure and home situation. Her family was comprised of "four brothers, one whole brother and three stepbrothers and my mom and dad are divorced." Tina lived with her mom and one younger stepbrother. Tina's mom worked in a service-related job and considered school important; Tina said that "I guess she [mom] wants me to get passed and get learned . . . she wants me to have the good life." Tina considered school as a get-away place from a life she was not happy in—"I get to get out of home"—yet something necessary for her future.

Tina particularly liked biology class because she felt a sense of community in the classroom due to relationships built with the teacher, Mr. Ruhl, and a small group of learners, most of whom were similar to Tina in ability and social class. Tina was very fond of Ruhl and noted that he was one of the few teachers in the school who knew her name and cared about whether she learned anything. As Tina entered class or interacted with Ruhl during lessons each day, she typically said something she found funny (that others might find off-the-wall) to gain his attention and to interact with him. Drawing from Brantlinger's (1993, 1995) research, Ruhl's caring actions could be interpreted as particularly important to learners like Tina who are from low-income homes, because those learners are sensitive to teachers' attitudes toward them as they have come to expect that they will not be liked or valued.

Tina liked the study guides and labs that small groups of learners worked on together during each class period. The unit guides for the class were designed by Ruhl to sift out key concepts in biology, help learners work through questions and activities covering the concepts, and focus learners on sections of the textbook to enable them to read and glean information (Dillon, O'Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 1994). Tina felt that Ruhl's guides, the primary texts in the class, helped her "really comprehend stuff."

Tina also felt that working with others in a small group helped her learn biology concepts better. However, Tina did not always feel good about her study group. Early in the semester she was assigned to work with learners she did not know well and who were from high-income and high social-class backgrounds; several of those learners also were academically superior to Tina. Several of Tina's group members ostracized her because of her lack of stylish clothing, her plain appearance, and her somewhat childish behavior. Those learners also categorized Tina as a lower ability learner, referring to her and others like her as "slackers." Thus, Tina often broke off from the small group and worked with one group member while the rest of the group moved ahead on its own. When asked about the group, Tina focused on the fact that she did not like the members because they "didn't talk about anything . . . they just wrote stuff down and they were just too fast."

While a member of that group, Tina found biology stressful and often did not pass the unit tests with an 80% or greater

accuracy. Because Ruhl used a mastery system, Tina usually completed practice activities and then took an alternate form of the unit test. Tina tended to attribute her poor work to her own inadequacies, not a result of a dysfunctional group wherein high-income (and high-academic) learners created tracking within the group because of their desire for segregation of group members by ability and social class. Tina's perceptions of herself reflect Brantlinger's (1993) findings that "social class affiliations and the unique experiences of members of difference classes influence learners' subjectivities" (p. 4).

At midsemester, Ruhl gave the students the opportunity to choose their new group members. Tina formed a group with 4 other learners (3 boys and 1 girl) who were from similar academic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Those students included Jay, Brian, Joey, and Carolyn. Tina felt comfortable working with her new group; they accepted her and valued her verbal and written contributions. It was so important to Tina to be a good friend and group member that she often completed sections of the study guide at home prior to class. She did this when she sensed that she could help the group because they might be behind on tasks or needed more time for labs. Tina's actions were caused in part by her interest Joey, a boy in her group.

The following account of a group session in April (3 months into the semester) shows how Tina positioned herself as a helpful and competent group member, exercised her authority as a person who was competent to do the dissecting during the lab (for the first time), and ensured that she was able to work in a lab group with the boy she liked. The issue of gender became a focal point for the second author as she observed this group where socioeconomic and academic issues were not forefronted. In using the term *gender*, I rely on West and Zimmerman's (1987) and West and Fenstermaker's (1995) work wherein they state that gender is not a set of traits, a variable, or a role, but rather:

An emergent property of social situations; both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements . . . [it is] routine, methodical, and ongoing . . . [and] involves a complex of perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of manly and womanly "natures." (p. 9)

For example, while observing Tina interact with her peers, another young girl exhibited a desire for others to like and value her and a sense of playfulness because she yearned for a special boy to feel that she was also special.

When completing labs, each small group broke up into partners or threesomes. Tina planned to work with Joey and Brian as her lab partners (leaving Carolyn and Jay to work together). Early on during class, Tina announced that she planned to do the dissecting during the "Anatomy of a Frog Lab," stating: "Somebody else can get the stuff [equipment], I have to cut it [frog] up." When no one responded she stated: "What do I have to get? Let me go get the stuff, dudes. You guys can write down my answers for me." Tina's motivation to get the lab equipment and do the dissecting

was grounded in her desire to work with Joey and impress him. Tina knew that Carolyn had dissected a grasshopper a few weeks earlier and that this action seemed to make her appear more interesting and important during group activities. Tina was pleased when she arrived back at the lab table with the dissecting supplies and noted that Brian and Joey would be working with her. As the 3 students began to work together, Tina openly glanced at Joey, constantly smiling at him. In the following excerpt, we observed that Tina's interest in Joey strongly influenced her interactions. She fluctuated between acting competent and acting in ways that some would call silly; all actions employed to impress Joey.

Tina: (to Joey in an ordering but playful tone) Get my paper. (She begins to touch the frog in a dissecting pan.)

Joey: (to Tina) OK, Cut!

Tina: (smiles) Shut up! Oh God! (throwing her hands in the air). Where do I gotta start, right here? (She motions to a spot on the frog's body and looks at Joey.)

Joey: It (the lab sheet) tells you right down there (he points to the diagram on the sheet).

Tina: (She glances at the sheet and wrinkles up her nose in distaste) Oh, I don't get this . . . I think I am going to hurt him (the frog).

Joey: Steady. Don't worry about it.

(Joey turns around to Brian and says, "She's worried she's going to hurt the frog!")

Tina: (to Joey) These scissors won't cut! Do we have to cut off its head? That's cruel! You must think I have it perfectly (as she begins to cut then looks at Joey). Just kidding! (She hands Joey the exacto knife.) Screw that in! (He does so. She then places her left arm out in front of him, motioning toward the watch on her arm.) Take this off. I don't want to get frog juice on it. (Joey takes off her watch.)

Joey: OK, find the (reading from the lab sheet) . . .

Tina: What? I *know*, but I've got to see it [the picture of the frog and the part she is to cut]. (Joey shows her a diagram from the textbook but it's the wrong one. Brian and Joey shuffle through the book. The actual diagram they should follow is drawn on the lab guide and labeled "How to open the frog" but the guide also indicates several pages in the textbook to use as dissection guides.)

Joey: All right, these [pages] are it.

Tina: Gimme this book (she reaches over and touches Joey's book).

Joey: No, you've got guts on your hands! (Tina smiles and touches the book as she points out information.) Oh, way to go—what are you doing?

Tina: Are you on the right page? (She looked at the lab guide and realizes he is not on the right textbook page. After more disagreement she whacks Joey playfully on the hand and looks at the diagrams with him—upside down—using his book.)

The Social and Literate Practices of Group Work

In the interactions above, Tina broke with what might be called "gender-typical language" (Moore, 1997) as she dominated the two male group members' discourse. It was

likely that Tina's dominating actions were a way of positioning herself and simultaneously "doing gender." For example, Tina's actions could be perceived as aggressive, exhibited as a way of overcoming a fear of rejection and feeling vulnerable, actions sometimes associated with low-income learners (Brantlinger, 1995). But along with acting bossy, Tina was playful in her comments and actions (e.g., "Get my pan. Shut up! Take this [watch] off" and whacking Joey on the arm). This combination of bossiness and playfulness was Tina's way of interacting with a boy she liked and someone she wanted to like her. Tina also appeared to defer to Joey (e.g., "Where do I gotta start . . . I don't get this) and even made comments intended to be entertaining when she indicated that the frog was still alive ("I think I am going to hurt him."). Tina's comments were a precursor to the two of them looking through Joey's book together to find the diagram needed to dissect the frog. Tina knew that touching Joey's book with "frog guts" on her hands was just the way to gain his attention. Thus, Tina was able to assert her authority, entertain Joey, and position herself as a serious group member interested in doing a good job dissecting the frog. Joey appeared to be annoyed with Tina when he stated: "She's worried she's going to hurt the frog!" and "Oh way to go—what are you doing?" However, he appeared to enjoy working with her and smiled at many of the things that she said and did.

The literate practices of the group members included the 3 students jointly reading the lab guide, skimming the textbook (particularly the diagrams when the lab guide did not seem to provide the necessary information), responding to each others' oral texts, and writing jointly constructed answers on the lab guide. Tina's role as the dissector in her group was also a literacy practice; she was performing as a scientist and using the action and discourse needed to be the authority figure. Students' interactions also indicated additional literacy practices within group work. Students knew that each member was to contribute in some way to the success of the group and the completion of assigned tasks. In the segment above and the one that follows, more interactions focused on Tina and on her interest in Joey.

Tina: Is that like the eyeball?

Joey: No, it's his ear—the timpanic ear membrane. (This is the first structure that the lab notes that they should locate on the frog.)

Tina: What's it do (the timpanic membrane)?

Joey: It hears. (Tina takes the scalpel and points or rather pokes at the spot on the frog.)

Joey: (somewhat sarcastically) Now it's not going to hear anything.

Tina: (Tina smiles). Put down *ear* (pointing to her worksheet). You guys have to fill mine out, OK, 'cause I have to cut it up. (She hands her lab sheet to Joey who takes it.)

Joey: I'll fill mine out then yours.

Brian: (thinking that he should dissect the frog so that he does not have to fill in Tina's guide) All right, I'll cut it up.

Tina: No you're not—that's my part! (then more softly) I already got my hands dirty and I think I should finish up. Now what do I gotta find next?

Joey: The tongue.

Tina: The licker? (She laughs and looks at Joey. Ruhl comes over.)

Joey: (to Ruhl) The timpanic ear—it's for hearing, right? (Making sure the answer he related to Tina was correct.)

Ruhl: Uh-huh.

Tina: It's right there, right? (She points at the spot she has previously poked at with Ruhl watching on.)

Ruhl: Right. See how it's like a grasshopper's (an insect previously studied).

Tina: (to Ruhl) He (the frog) looks ferocious!

Ruhl: Yep, a killer frog. (He proceeds to tell Tina about a better way to cut into the frog to be able to see parts that they are to identify later on in the lab, particularly the tongue.)

Tina: (cutting along the jaw line of the frog) Oh my God! It's (the tongue) coming out—Mr. Ruhl! (She puts her hand over her mouth in dramatic distress, moaning and looking away.)

Joey: What's it for?

Tina: For licking. (Ruhl disregards this response and proceeds to explain how the tongue works. Tina suddenly looks back at the frog with renewed curiosity, pulling out the tongue with some tweezers.) Yucky! (Ruhl moves to another group and the 3 learners continue.)

Merging Social and Academic Agendas

In the interactions above, as Tina gained more confidence as the team member doing the dissection, she continued to fluctuate between her aggressive and sometimes impulsive actions and her attempts to entertain and impress group members. Joey kept the group moving forward but acquiesced to Tina's request that someone else fill out her lab sheet because she was cutting up the frog. At one point Tina was challenged by Brian for the job of dissector. She was aggressive in maintaining her position but realized that she must keep her group members as friends and thus softened her response to include [because] "I already got my hands dirty." For Tina, the performative and social aspects of the lab experiment, particularly the opportunity to talk with and impress Joey, were more important to her than the work (cf. Martinez, 1992). However, Tina was concerned about having group responses written on her lab guide. Joey, on the other hand, appeared more interested in the group finishing the task with correct responses. As Ruhl visited the group, Joey queried him to ensure that the answers they had written on the lab sheet were on target. Tina observed Joey's interactions with Ruhl and followed Joey's lead by showing Ruhl that she knew where the frog's ear was located. She seemed at a loss for what to say next and put forth what she perceived to be a funny comment. She looked at both Ruhl and Joey, hoping they would find her remarks entertaining and interesting, but they did not respond. Instead, Ruhl worked

to socialize Tina, or perhaps to position her into the role of learner, by explaining better techniques that she could use to dissect the frog and about how a frog's tongue works.

An examination of Tina's experiences with her first group provides an example of Wexler's (1992) claim that "school is not a socially neutral setting and differences in class are key to impacting the lives of adolescents." Tina's dress, nonstandard language patterns, appearance, and ways of acting may have been cultural signs and social class signals (Wexler, 1988) that influenced others' opinions of Tina, thus promoting their positioning of her in a low social and academic class status. However, Grant and Sleeter (1988) noted that social tension results from more than just social class issues. That tension includes gender, race, and achievement factors; the latter of which was a key reason that Tina's first group did not want to work with her. Although Tina's second group accepted her without the stigma of being from a different social and academic group, Tina often positioned herself to be taken less seriously when she attempted to be entertaining. She noted that those actions worked for more popular girls (e.g., Carolyn), so she acted in a similar manner to gain attention and acceptance throughout the semester.

Tina's second group seemed to appreciate her as a person, friend, and fellow learner and together they created a sense of community for themselves within the classroom community. Tina's interest in Joey and her beliefs about what girls do to attract a boy's attention influenced how she positioned herself and was positioned by others. As Weis (1990) noted, "gendered subjectivities take their shape and form historically in an economic context" (p. 86), meaning that Tina's gendered actions were affected by her social class. Tina's aggressiveness was a way to ensure acceptance both in her role as the dissector and in her interactions with the boy whom she liked. She was direct, physical, and brash. When Tina appeared to acquiesce to Joey, she was actually seeking to entertain, but she maintained some control within the interactions.

A careful examination of Tina's case shows a classroom context that was learner oriented; the teacher wanted all his students to find biology interesting and achievable. Small groups provided a context in which learners could achieve academic and social agendas. Literacy events that occurred within group work (completing the lab) were enacted with specific practices or ways of reading and writing to complete the work. Specifically, learners were to work together on the lab, talk about what they observed and understood to learn various biology concepts, and complete the lab guide or assignment to prepare them for the unit examination. Texts included the teacher-created materials (study guides and labs), learner-generated texts (written responses on the study guides and labs), and oral-language texts (teacher and learner discourse during group work interactions). It is clear that for learners in this classroom, context (e.g., the group they work with, the individuals in the group) made a difference in what was learned and in the literacy practices they used to learn.

In the next section, O'Brien explains how the constructs of learner, text, and context were shaped and how they shaped each other in intersecting literacy events and practices encompassing events in a program designed for at-risk learners at Jefferson High School. O'Brien uses data from a 5-year study on the literacy engagement of low-achieving high school learners in a program that wed the use of print with a variety of other media, particularly multimedia authoring using computers and related technology (Dillon, O'Brien, Wellinski, Springs, & Stith, 1996). In the analysis, O'Brien focuses on particular situations in which reading, writing, and other communicative practices were used to highlight the linguistic, racial, and cultural diversity of the learners.

How Learners Create and Work Within Contexts: Angel, Dario, and Juan

The learners that I interacted with were 3 male students—Angel, Dario, and Juan—from Jefferson High. The 3 students were recent émigrés to the United States from Mexico. Jefferson High, traditionally a White, middle-class school, has experienced increasing racial tension with the influx of Hispanic learners during the last 5 years. That tension culminated 2 years ago in a major altercation among Black, White, and Hispanic learners that began in the school building and spilled out into the parking lot. The students were aware of the increasing tension overall, and a certain intolerance for racial diversity in the community was cited by school officials as a possible contributing factor for racial tension in the school. Students reported nonviolent racial tensions and cited the existence of White supremacist groups among the student body.

Angel has been in this country the longest; he spoke standard English well and wrote it fluently. He was outgoing, creative, and hardworking in school. Angel worked hard to fit in with White learners in the lab. Dario struggled with spoken standard English, had a fair command of grammar, but had trouble reading English. His written English was more polished than his spoken English. Dario was easygoing, but shy around his Anglo peers because of his difficulty with English. He reluctantly participated in group activities with a smile that betrayed his amiable nature. Juan had been in the United States for 1 year. He neither spoke nor wrote standard English well enough so that his native English-speaking peers could understand him. He spoke only when working on projects or sitting at a table with Dario, and he looked to Dario when someone spoke to him in English. The teachers who worked with those learners considered Angel to be a good learner and Dario to be a pleasant, compliant learner. They were unsure about Juan because of his limited English proficiency; they usually paired him with Dario.

In the following paragraphs, I present data from three events to illustrate how the literacy practices of the learners, shaped by the episodes, highlight social and cultural ways

of using literacy. In each event, literacy was considered a social construction with multiple, rather than single, literacies embedded in specific *practices*, which are considered to be generally understood cultural ways of using literacy that persons draw upon in each event (Barton, 1994; Street, 1984, 1995). The texts in these data clips ranged from printed texts and print-plus-nonprint media texts created by the learners to published texts typical of schooled literacy tasks.

A Multimedia Authoring Collaboration

Angel is working on a HyperCard application with Chad, a White learner who is a native of Lafayette. They have become partners and friends to an extent, by selecting each other as collaborators on projects in the literacy lab. Their task was to use a story about two boys stranded in the ocean and attacked by sharks, segment the printed text, enter each segment on a separate HyperCard card, illustrate it, and construct transition effects between cards. They then explored other forms of representation to expand the text. They illustrated the story by selecting graphics from the HyperCard Art Bits graphics library. The following video transcription illustrates the event.

Angel: Keep going. There is another one [a graphic]. How about this one? (pointing to a picture of a man opening a door) Chad ignores this and scrolls to another screen and puts the cursor on an image that looks sort of like a person with a long tail.

Angel: Yeah—yeah, yeah, yeah—but it is supposed to be a man.

Chad: Okay. (Chad keeps scrolling. He comes across a screen of symbols.)

Angel: There (pointing). We need this shape to work with the . . . Could we enlarge one of them? [pointing to another symbol]

Chad: Yeah, we can.

Angel: Oh, oh, go back! What is that? What is that?

Together Angel and Chad compromised on selecting sea creatures before they select people. They passed a turtle, a fish, and a starfish on the first card of the stack. To place the graphics objects, Angel took over the mouse from Chad. Chad moved his chair back to accommodate Angel.

Angel: What about one of these?

Chad: Don't need one. 'Cause you have crabs at night. Crabs! You should have printed it all up like we were supposed to.

(After they worked to insert the graphics, Chad took the mouse back to fine-tune the display and Angel directed him where to move things.)

The two learners jointly constructed the project. Racial differences and agendas were not obvious, and the learners manipulated the printed text with other media but wrote no original printed text. An important literacy practice was the appropriation of academic roles and voices necessary to complete a project that they were both proud of. The give

and take of their oral text, as they constructed the project, established their collaborative academic relationship as well as their friendship. Angel seemed motivated to accommodate the structures and tasks of the lab (McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997) and enjoyed the rewards in terms of collaborating with Chad, receiving praise from his teachers, and completing a project for which he received a good grade.

A Story about Terrorist Drug Runners

Dario and Juan were inseparable in the literacy lab. Juan was Dario's friend; Dario was Juan's self-appointed English-as-a-second-language tutor. The following excerpt from field and viewing notes illustrates the relationship.

Dario and Juan work on a story Dario started with Scott, a White learner. Dario, who started the text, put himself, Juan, and Scott in the story. Dario characterized the Scott character as a sort of dunderhead. When Scott tried to edit the story to paint a more appealing picture of the character with his name, Dario and Juan took the keyboard from him, laughing at his plight. Scott quit working on the project, returning angrily to his seat, and Dario and Juan continued, laughing.

Dario and Juan continue reading the story that Dario started. Dario scrolls over the text he has written thus far with the cursor. As he slides the cursor down, he automatically translates the text into Spanish for Juan. Every once in awhile when they reach a funny part (e.g., when the text makes fun of Scott and Dario embellishes it in Spanish), Juan laughs.

Dario and Juan successfully and not so tactfully ejected Scott, who was a member of neither their cultural nor social group, from their group work; Scott was not interested in their cultural background nor was he particularly accommodating of their race. As they worked together, Juan was learning the English equivalents for Spanish as Dario read the Spanish for him, and Juan looked at the English on the screen. Juan enjoyed the story and was very attentive in figuring out the English. He was comfortable with Dario as his tutor. In the next field note excerpt, Dario was at a point in the story where he, Juan, and Scott were ambushed by terrorist Colombian drug dealers after having captured some of the terrorist group. Dario wrote:

They were aiming at Scott and told us to surrender or they would kill us. I saw everything and I hide behind the truck and watch and then I see the one that was missing came out of his hiding place.

At this point, Dario types in more text as Juan intently watches the screen.

Then I follow them silently.

In Spanish, Juan asks Dario about part of the sentence. Dario replies in Spanish and Juan nods to signal he is satisfied with the answer. Then Dario gives Juan about a minute to reread the entire text on the screen, including the new sentence. When he knows Juan is finished, Dario continues typing:

I jump out at them but Scott and Juan start to kick the terrorist' ass.

Dario waits for Juan to read the sentence. At this point, Juan looks over across Dario and Dario hands him an electronic English/Spanish dictionary. On a card on the top cover of the electronic dictionary, Juan jots down the words he does not know, then types them into the device. When the translation of this last sentence is complete, Juan laughs. Dario continues with the story.

That literacy event supports multiple literacies through various literate practices. On a level that could be called cultural literacy, an implicitly social and cultural process (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994), Dario used the story as a shared text to construct and affirm his own and Juan's cultural identity and connections. The American, Scott, is a foil. The story attaches machismo to his partner Juan and to himself. Although Scott tried to help his companion in the adventure, he was captured by the drug cartel and had to plead with Dario and Juan to free him. The story portrays the solidarity between the Dario and Juan characters through Dario's code switching (Losey, 1995). On a related level, the text provided a link to Dario and Juan's particular youth culture, an adventure with destruction and death. On yet another level, Dario scaffolded Juan's understanding of written English in a sort of linguistic pluralism (Delpit, 1995), allowing Juan to learn English in a nonthreatening narrative by explaining the English text in Spanish and highlighting it in Spanish as he produced it.

Round-Robin Reading About Walt Disney

In the following lesson, Dario was removed from his partner, Juan. Dario was working in a small group with 4 other learners including Scott. The following viewing session notes from a videotaped lesson starkly contrasts this event with the one previously presented:

The group, lead by a preservice teacher, takes turns reading aloud segments of a biographical selection on Walt Disney. Each learner who finishes reading calls on one of her or his peers to read the next segment. Scott shouts, "I call on Dario!" Dario has been sitting with the text in front of his face, hiding from the camera and even from his group. Dario, who holds the text in front of his face, struggles intermittently with the fifth-grade text. He pronounces the words in the text with an accent that his peers find hard to follow. The teacher candidate corrects his missed words and his renditions she believes are too heavily clad in a Spanish accent. Two group members to Dario's left, Donna and Katie, talk to each other during his reading. After putting Dario on the spot by calling on him to read, Scott closes his eyes, puts his head down on his arms, and feigns sleep. The teacher candidate, rather than asking Dario who he would like to select to read next says, "Donna, you read."

In that event, which highlights schooled literacy (Barton, 1994; O'Brien, 1998), Dario had little cultural power (Delpit, 1995) or personal autonomy. His participation in the event was regulated by literacy practices grounded in the institution of schooling and a discourse (Gee, 1996) that alienated him. He was not accepted socially by the group. The culturally based literacy practices that he embraced and

celebrated when working with Juan were marginalized in the event. The teacher candidate diligently corrected his dialect, an insult to both his cultural identity and his self-esteem (Delpit, 1995). The power and autonomy that he had when working with Juan were stripped away. He hid behind the irrelevant text on Walt Disney, feeling alienated.

Comparison and Analysis of the Three Events

The three events showcase contrasting literacy practices (Barton, 1994; Street, 1995). The Chicano learners, Angel, Dario, and Juan engaged in literate practices, general cultural ways of using literacy, that were socially constructed by each event (Street, 1995). The events were informed by a variety of contexts: In the broad community context, the traditionally White community was undergoing a gradual painful integration of an increasing number of Hispanic residents. The school reflected community values and evidenced a lack of resources in dealing with bicultural and bilingual populations. Individual classrooms shaped practices that reflected the community and school and introduced unique climates shaped by teachers.

Angel worked well with White learners, was familiar with the discourse (Gee, 1996) of schooling, and knew the advantage of acculturation and assimilation into the dominant group (Ogbu, 1987). Although Angel worked well with other Chicano learners on culturally relevant projects (e.g., a multimedia report on Poncho Villa), the data excerpts demonstrated that he could have engaged in practices of the dominant group, delving into the culture of power (Delpit, 1995). He could have appropriated whatever forms of reading, writing, and interaction were necessary to complete schoolwork with almost anyone in the class.

The two contrasting events in which Dario participated showed dramatically how an event shapes and is shaped by culturally appropriate literate practices. The explanations for why minority learners are unsuccessful in some school settings or events and successful in others are complex. For example, cultural mismatch perspectives (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983) attribute school problems to a mismatch between community-home contexts and schools in terms of interaction, participation structures, and language patterns. Dario's failure and frustration in the oral reading group and his success in working with Juan are examples of a mismatch and match, respectively. When Dario worked with Juan, he used practices that were familiar and culturally congruent and texts that were culturally shared and relevant; his success with Juan illustrates the importance of cultural congruence in learning.

The teacher context perspective is also important. Teachers' perspectives shape learners' perspectives in an event. For example, Angel was viewed as successful because he was able to assimilate into the classroom culture. Dario and Juan (to a lesser degree) were viewed as less competent and deficient in literacy because of their limited ability with standard English (cf. Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Delpit, 1995).

Hence, teachers interacted differently with those students; the learners' perceptions of their teachers and their own ability were affected. The learners, in turn, viewed school and their participation in it differently than the dominant group did.

Conclusions and Implications

What do the observational, interview, and artifactual data about the many contexts of learners' in-school and out-of-school lives indicate about the interaction of text, context, and learner in reading and writing processes? Initially, text, context, and learner cannot be considered independent of each other. Furthermore, learners' various subject positions and identities are constructed in relation to the many contexts they move through from day to day and moment to moment, and learners' identities both shape and reflect the meanings they make from text, their interactions with text, and the ways they are positioned or position themselves. Thus, when we say that literacy processes are a result of a complex interaction of learning, text, and context, we need to recognize that each of those is multidimensional and always changing, especially in an age of alternative information and the ways in which it is generated. There is not one learner, living in one context, making meaning of one text. Similarly, the texts that learners encounter and construct acquire a number of different meanings as the processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and performing texts are shaped by the social and cultural practices that persons bring to their literate interactions in various contexts. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) stated that "One of the great difficulties posed in the analysis of context is describing the socio-historical knowledge that a participant employs to act within the environment of the moment" (p. 5). As information and communication systems continue to grow and expand, we believe that contexts will become even more diverse, more shifting, and more tenuous.

Thus, the three cases challenge us as secondary literacy researchers and teachers to broaden our understanding of the interaction among learner, context, and text in reading and writing processes as we move into a new millennium in which contexts are always changing as persons and information are moved quickly from place to place. Our research, together with several other studies of secondary literacy (Alvermann, Hinchmann, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Athanases, 1998; Fairbanks, 1998; Henry, 1998; Stewart, in press; Sturtevant, 1996), indicates that classroom teachers, school administrators, and literacy researchers should develop their awareness and understanding of the multiple contexts that shape learners' lives and their ways of learning, realizing that schools and classrooms are always immersed in and reflective of broader social and community contexts (cf. McLaughlin, Talbert, & Bascia, 1990).

Furthermore, we should understand that contexts are dynamic and always changing because they are constructed by their participants. The emphasis on how participants

shape contexts, however, should not suggest that all participants have an equal position in constructing context; some social forces have more power than others in this process. For example, although Tina's actions shaped the context of her group, she was not as powerful as was Ruhl in influencing how the group worked through their assignments. Similarly, Dario, Juan, and Khek constructed contexts through their actions; but less marginalized learners (e.g., Angel) and their teachers had more power than Dario, Juan, and Khek to choose the texts read and written by the class and thus to construct the contexts of their literacy learning in particular ways. Those constructions have powerful implications for learning. Khek, for example, resisted the construction of reading and writing in her classroom by not participating. She contributed to the construction of the literacy learning context in her classroom, but her contribution further marginalized her because she was not engaged in the activities of the class.

Our data also indicate that secondary literacy educators and researchers need to reconsider how they explore, write about, and teach to the multiple and complex identities that learners construct in various contexts both in school and out of school. We might begin by questioning our assumptions about what learners are interested in, know, and understand. By questioning our assumptions, we may come to the realization that adolescents' ways of knowing, believing, thinking, and acting shape the ways they engage in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, just as our own ways of knowing, believing, thinking, and acting shape the ways we conduct our research on secondary and adolescent literacy or the ways in which we teach content and use reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As we move into a new millennium, learners will possess different knowledge and skills than the learners we once knew in our classrooms.

For example, how could we use the case of Tina to question our assumptions? It would be easy to view Tina as immature and attention seeking; a less-than-serious learner. We may forget that learners are individuals who have multiple identities that they shift in and out of at will, or are positioned into by others. We also need to recognize that we position individual learners into one-dimensional roles in our attempt to meet the needs of a classroom of learners. Often our positioning results in differentiated teaching. Although Ruhl did not explicitly engage in that behavior, many teachers have reduced their teaching efforts for low-income and low-social class students. In addition, numerous teachers expect less of those learners as compared with the brighter students. It is clear that educators must be aware of learners as individual and gendered persons in the classrooms (Dillon & Moje, 1998). Equipped with this knowledge, Ruhl might have learned of Tina's desire to become a veterinarian and encouraged her role as dissector in her group, particularly in light of new studies suggesting that girls benefit academically from taking active roles in lab work (Burkham, Lee, & Smerdon, 1997). He also might have understood her desire to appear entertaining to her

group as being indicative of her interest in Joey. With that knowledge, Ruhl could have helped Tina explore other ways to be powerful as a learner. Rather, Ruhl saw Tina as most of us would—an immature, struggling learner—instead of a young, adolescent woman with multiple goals and identities.

In a related vein, learners in classrooms of the future will draw on different kinds of texts than they have in the past because the new texts are more readily available as a result of new information technologies. Research on media and popular culture (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994) suggests that learners increasingly will use television, magazines, popular books, movies, music, and the Internet as sources of knowledge and information. To draw from learners' interests and to meet their needs, literacy teachers, teacher educators, and researchers should begin to examine those texts and employ them in the classrooms. We do not advocate, however, simply bringing new texts into our classrooms; like Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), we perceive the media and popular cultural texts as tools to examine assumptions about the world and to help young people think about the ways they are positioned and position themselves.

Finally, we need to understand that many literacy pedagogies and processes are based in Eurocentric practices and thus privilege the experiences and identities of European Americans. This Eurocentric bias is especially relevant when we consider the privileging of print-based texts in schools and classrooms (cf. Eisner, 1994; Gardner, 1983; Olson, 1977). Following a broadened perspective on text, we need to recognize that they are comprised not only of print but also of other forms of symbolic representation such as pictures, conversations, video, electronic images, and performances. Given the acknowledgment that there are many ways to "textualize" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1992) experience, teachers and researchers need to learn about and draw from the many different literacies and texts displayed and generated by learners.

In light of these many suggestions for secondary literacy research and practice in the next millennium, we should also offer suggestions for methods or pedagogies that align with these ideas. Our research over the last 12 years has led us to problematize many of the strictly cognitive solutions offered in the secondary literacy research literature; not because these solutions—or strategies—are ineffective, but because they cannot address alone all aspects of what it means to engage in literacy processes and practices. Because (a) literacy is a cognitive, social, and cultural *practice* as well as *process*; (b) acts of literacy are imbued with power and ideology; and (c) the relationship among contexts, texts, and learners is complex and multidimensional, we believe that there are no easy answers or prescribed pedagogies that will ensure success for all learners in their literate interactions in secondary schools. Consequently, we offer a set of questions that secondary educators might ask themselves as they approach the teaching of discipline-based concepts and the

use of literacy and texts in secondary school settings. These questions are not designed to solve problems, but rather, to raise tensions and dilemmas (Alvermann, 1998) that teachers, learners, and researchers can struggle with collaboratively (Dillon, O'Brien, & Heilman, in press).

Questions for Thinking About Learners, Texts, and Contexts in Secondary Literacy

Learner Questions

We offer the following group of questions to help educators understand their learners as persons. This understanding is especially important for an era in which classrooms will become more diverse, prohibiting us from assuming anything about the students whom we are charged to teach. Our research indicates that although it is probably not possible to know each of our 150 to 180 secondary school learners in depth, we can continually ask ourselves who might be in our classrooms and whether we are assuming knowledge, interests, and goals on the basis of our own experiences or according to what we know about the learners we teach. We can also strive to know several different learners who can then serve as touchstones for the larger group of learners in our classrooms. For each of us, our research that focuses on small groups of learners has encouraged us to think differently about all learners and, consequently, to think differently about our own teaching of both secondary and postsecondary learners. We suggest that secondary school teachers might also think very differently about all learners if they could have opportunities to know a small, diverse subset of learners in depth each year. Our questions on understanding learners as persons include:

1. What do I know about who my learners are as persons?
2. What identities do my learners seem to have constructed for themselves? What identities have been constructed for them via school files, teacher's lounge gossip, parents' communications?
3. What are my feelings toward learners of different social class groups? How do my feelings affect my interactions with learners? Are there school and classroom practices that seem to support the notion that the intelligence and worth of learners vary by class, race, or gender? If so, how can I change those practices?
4. What identities would learners like to construct for themselves? How can I find this out?
5. In what ways can I acknowledge and value the various identities that my learners present without necessarily valorizing negative or potentially destructive identities or practices (e.g., violent gang practices)?

Textual Questions

We designed this group of questions to encourage educators to think more broadly about the texts that they make

available to learners. In this section, we focused specifically on ways to incorporate the texts that young people value and use in their lives outside of the classroom as tools for learning content and literacy skills and processes. We also encourage educators to think about ways to use nonprint texts to develop learners' cognitive abilities (cf. Eisner, 1994), to engage learners in texts of interest to them (Alvermann et al., 1999), and to offer alternative ways to represent understanding to those learners who struggle with decoding and encoding print in standard forms. Our questions regarding selected texts include:

1. How will my choices of texts and literacy activities shape the social organization of my classroom?
2. How will my choices of texts and literacy activities reflect *and* expand the cultural backgrounds of my learners? How will my choices reflect *and* expand my cultural background?
3. What forms of representation in addition to print might I offer my learners to help them more fully express themselves and represent their understandings of content?

Context Questions

As in the other areas, we offer questions about context that emphasize diversity and difference in current and future contexts. Especially in urban school settings, which often draw from large geographical areas and a number of different cultural, economic, language, and religious groups, we cannot assume contexts to be homogeneous. We also cannot assume them to be stable; we must therefore continually assess the context of our teaching. Our questions on context include:

1. What is the community surrounding my school like? What are the social and political interests of the community in which my school is located?
2. What are the cultural backgrounds of my learners? How are these cultural groups viewed in the community?
3. What is my cultural background? How is it reflected in my teaching? How is it represented in the school and surrounding community?
4. What is the dominant culture of this community? How is it reflected in school practices and curriculum? How is it reflected in my teaching?
5. What has been the typical social organization of my classroom(s)? What do I hope to achieve in terms of social organization?
6. How will my pedagogical approaches help to change the context of my classroom? What might I have to change about the pedagogy I use? What will I have to change or challenge in my own beliefs?

Answers to the questions that we pose are not easily forthcoming or singular in nature. Just as context influences and is influenced by the learner and text, teachers and their curricula are shaped by and shape the contexts in which

they teach. Thus, there are few generalizations for teaching in the new millennium because contexts of the future will be even more shifting and tenuous than they are currently. Rather, secondary literacy educators might use these questions to view learners, themselves, texts, and the contexts in which they live and work in new ways for the new times that are ahead.

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