Learning to do Shared Inquiry in a Fourth Grade Classroom

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LEARNING TO DO SHARED INQUIRY IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM

Dissertation

By

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of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Learning to do Shared Inquiry in a Fourth Grade Classroom

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This qualitative dissertation, informed by sociocultural theory (Gee, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978), examines how a fourth grade teacher and his students learned to participate in Shared Inquiry, a discussion practice where students learn how to build an evidential argument, including a claim that is supported by evidence and justified by a warrant (Toulmin, 1969). Students also learn how to weigh the merits of opposing arguments and how to modify their initial opinions as evidence demands. Over the course of ten weeks, the fourth grade teacher implemented Shared Inquiry as part of the Junior Great Books (JGB) program, offered as a supplement to a district mandated reading program. The teacher was observed while using the JGB program and while providing instruction through the mandated reading program. He participated in action research (Stringer, 2007) to examine how to make Shared Inquiry most successful. This dissertation describes how the teacher’s action research enabled his students to become successful with Shared Inquiry, after they initially struggled with the practice. Over time, they learned a new way of engaging, not only with literature, but also with fellow classmates. This dissertation also describes how the fourth grade students learned a different set of literacy practices through the mandated reading program. The argument is made that Shared Inquiry has the potential to be a far more substantively engaging (Nystrand, 2006; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, 1997) literacy practice than the mandated reading program.
I dedicate this dissertation to four very special people who have had a great impact on my life.

To my wonderful husband, Michael. Thank you for your incredible, everlasting support. Thank you for letting me cry on your shoulder that very first year when all I wanted to do was quit and return to my "normal" life as a classroom teacher. You have encouraged me throughout each step of this eight-year journey. I could not have possibly completed this massive endeavor without you. We tied the knot in the first year and now we are the proud parents of two beautiful girls…and this dissertation. I love you.

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To my remarkable mentor, Mrs. Millicent Veal. I will never forget the first time you walked into my third grade classroom. Mrs. Veal, you taught me how to teach. I carry the lessons you taught me into every classroom I enter. In the words of an anxious young teacher I knew once upon a time, "You rock."

To my amazing mother, Mrs. Carole Herman. Thank you also for your love, support, and encouragement. I am so happy to celebrate with you at the finish line. I love you.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The literary text must not be reduced to exercise or drill, but must be allowed to live as a work of art, influencing the reader to see, think, and feel (Probst, 1994, p. 37).

The fourth grade classroom that served as the setting for this research was in a school deemed a low performing institution on the No Child Left Behind Annual Report Card. As a result, in 2007 the school was mandated to use a state approved reading program. The fourth grade teacher was required to use this program for ninety minutes every morning. In the Fall of 2008, I met with the school principal to describe my interest in observing how a classroom learned to do Shared Inquiry, the discussion technique at the heart of the Junior Great Books Program (JGB). The school principal gave the teacher permission to offer JGB as an afternoon supplement to the mandated reading program for the purpose of this research. The following
three interview excerpts, from students in this classroom, describe the unique experiences these students had with Shared Inquiry--

Saul: Usually in our class we don’t get much time to discuss the books we read, but in Shared Inquiry we get that time. (Week VII)

Albert: In Shared Inquiry, I get to know what other people think about the stories we are reading and they get to know what I think. (Week IX)

Jezell: I like Shared Inquiry because it makes me learn more about stories. I never heard about those stories before. So, it makes me learn more and more about reading. (Week X)

Each excerpt suggests that Shared Inquiry provided these students with new opportunities to explore literature and engage with classmates. Initially, the teacher and his students struggled with Shared Inquiry. I argue in this dissertation that this was likely because this new practice was very different from the typical literacy practices in this classroom.

This dissertation is a case study that examines how the fourth grade teacher and his students learned to become successful with Shared Inquiry. Many studies have documented the benefit of the Shared Inquiry experience however there has been little research on how teachers and students learn to engage in this practice. I will describe how action research with the teacher enabled the class to become successful with Shared Inquiry. I will also describe how through Shared Inquiry, the teacher and students learned a new, different set of literacy practices. The mandated reading program reduces the teaching of reading to discrete skill instruction. The next section of this chapter explores how such a technical approach to reading instruction emerged
and why it is problematic. I will then explain how discussion practices like Shared Inquiry teach higher order thinking and critical reflection on text and discourse.

**Learning to Read is a Complex Process**

As I indicate above, the urban school which served as the setting for this research, was mandated by the government to use a state approved reading program that reduces the teaching of reading to discrete skill instruction. Out of the fear that a significant number of children in America are struggling to learn to read, the teaching of reading has been has been reduced to basic skill instruction, especially in low performing urban schools (Gee, 2004; Hirsch, 2003). Anyon (1997) noted a disparity in the 1970s between poor urban schools and high income schools in Newark, New Jersey; the poorer urban schools were essentially “basic skills districts,” while the more affluent districts provided more enhanced educational opportunities. This effort to reduce reading to basic skill instruction became more widespread in 1983 after the release of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), a report by the Reagan administration laden with disturbing findings on the condition of education in the United States (Ravitch, 2000). The report declared, “Our Nation is at risk. The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (p. 1). Out of alarm that large numbers of American school children are failing to learn basic reading skills, several authoritative panels have been appointed by the federal government. The purpose of these panels is to carry out objective reviews of reading research in order to yield a rough consensus on the best instructional practices to teach reading, how to identify children at risk, and how to intervene effectively.
The most influential report on reading issues in recent years was compiled by the National Reading Panel, under the auspices of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). In 1997, the NICHD established the panel with the charge of compiling a report assessing “the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” and with designing “a strategy for rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective instruction in the school” (NICHD, 2000b, p. 1-1).

Published in 2000, the National Reading Panel Report has been hailed as a “remarkable development in the application of research to practice in reading education” (Shanahan, 2004, p. 235). This report implies that all that children need to learn to read are sets of basic skills believed to be integral to literacy development. The National Reading Panel states that “Reading or learning how to read is a combination of all the skills mentioned in the report” (NICHD, 2000a, p.4), namely phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

This position, that children only require a set of basic skills to learn to read, is a reflection of cognitive-psychological theory. According to cognitive-psychological theory, there are qualitative and quantitative differences between experienced and beginner readers (Hall, 2003). As children learn to read, they progress through different stages which are characterized by the addition of more efficient ways of identifying words. There are several stage models in the cognitive-psychological literature (e.g. Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1987; Gough & Hillinger, 1980). All of them accord huge importance to teaching children how to decode or decipher words, attribute priority to early learning of spelling-sound correspondences, and are in favor of making the alphabetic system as explicit as possible.

As a result of recent federal legislation around literacy instruction, there has been increased assessment and instruction on alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral
reading fluency as the main enabling skills and significant predictors of later reading achievement (Garan, 2001; Paris, 2005; Pearson, 2001; Shanahan, 2004). It seems the federal government endorses a cognitive-psychological model of reading which views learning to read as the acquisition of basic skills. This was evident on January 8, 2002, when President Bush Sr. signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which added two new reading programs to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act-- Early Reading First and Reading First. Based on the premise that literacy is a learned skill, the initiative promoted “coherent, skill-based reading instruction to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade” (DOE, 2006). These programs were created to address the growing concern that many of our nation’s children begin kindergarten without the necessary foundation to fully benefit from formal school instruction.

Despite this legislation, an instructional emphasis on skill-based reading instruction has not had a remarkable effect on the achievement gap. Students who are at risk tend to fall back,fueling the phenomenon known as the “fourth grade slump.” The “slump” is the name Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin (1990) used over two decades ago to describe the sudden drop-off between third and fourth grade in the reading scores of low-income students. Many children appear to be making adequate progress in reading early on. Then, around fourth grade, they begin to experience reading and learning difficulties when faced with complex content. Gee (2004) makes the case that while a stress in the early grades on phonological awareness and overt phonics instruction does initially help “at risk” students, it does not bring them up to par with more advantaged students. According to Gee, “even though the vast majority of our youngest readers can manage simple texts, many students—particularly those from low-income families—struggle when it comes time in grade four to tackle more advanced academic texts (p.10).”
Chall makes the case that these children, fed on a steady diet of standardized reading and standardized tests, have learned to translate letters into words and sounds, but they begin to fall behind as language and thinking demands become more complex, technical, and specialized. Research has shown that many children who pass reading tests in the early grades have difficulty learning content later on when the emphasis shifts in school from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” (Gee, 2004). The fourth grade slump happens when children are not well prepared for the increasing linguistic and cognitive demands of the complex forms of language, symbolic representations, and thinking demanded by academic content areas like mathematics, science, and history. Recent data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirm that very few fourth graders perform at the proficient or advanced levels on reading tests (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). According to data from the 2007 administration of the NAEP, only 25% of fourth graders were “able to demonstrate a strong understanding of the text… to extend the ideas in the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their own experiences,” and just 8% were able to “judge texts critically… and explain their judgments… make generalizations about the point of a story and extend its meaning by integrating personal experiences and other readings” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007, p. 24).

The fundamental problem is that the cognitive-behavioral model assumes learning to read is an autonomous process (Street, 2003). Children absolutely do require formal instruction in order to develop alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral reading fluency. However, as Gee (1996) and Street (1995) argue, children do not learn to read once and for all. In order to avoid a literacy slump, instruction must also prepare children to manage the increasing linguistic and cognitive demands of schooling. Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, and Freppon (1995) and Sacks &
Mergendoller (1997) make the case that children particularly from low-income families benefit even more from rich language and literacy environments than they do from exclusive skills based reading instruction. As Anyon (1997) suggests, children in low income school districts do not always have the academic resources and instruction provided to those children in more affluent districts.

In response to these concerns, many educators are now directing their attention to critical literacy (Callison, 2000; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2001). Critical literacy instruction goes beyond the simple decoding of text or basic determination of meaning. Murphy, Soter, Wilkinson, Hennessey, and Alexander (2009) use the term critical literacy as it relates to higher order thinking and critical reflection on text and discourse. The goal is “to help students achieve a high-level comprehension of text, to read beyond a text’s surface, and to surpass the acquisition of lower order thinking skills” (Murphy, et al., 2009, p. 741). Murphy et al. identify a number of approaches to conducting “intellectually stimulating discussions” that appear to be effective in promoting high-level responses to text in elementary as well as high school settings, including Socratic Seminars (Tredway, 1995), Paideia (Adler, 1982), Grand Conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), Literature Circles (Daniels & Steineke, 2004), Instructional Conversations (Goldenberg, 1992), Book Clubs (Raphael, Goatley, McMahon, & Woodman, 1995), and Shared Inquiry (Foundation, 1992). Shared Inquiry is the discussion practice explored in this dissertation.

**Shared Inquiry**

Shared Inquiry is the discussion practice at the heart of the Junior Great Books Program. It is a teacher guided, whole group discussion that occurs after all the students have read, or listened to, a literature selection at least twice. Activities such as a sharing questions session and
a directed notes event prepare students for each discussion. The teacher launches Shared Inquiry with an interpretive question. An interpretive question is one that has at least two answers that one can support with evidence from the text. The role of the teacher is not to push the class towards consensus or a “correct” reading of a text, but rather to assist the students in examining the text for evidence to support their claim and to encourage others to agree, disagree, or point to supplementary or competing evidence (Michaels & Cazden, 2006). The practice can enable students to develop critical literacy skills to include reading carefully, thinking critically, listening intently, and speaking and writing persuasively (Great Books Foundation, 1999).

When children are engaged in Shared Inquiry, the premise is that learning to read occurs within a sociocultural community. Children learn to read not only through direct formal instruction, but also through social interaction, through observation and modeling, cooperative participation, and scaffolding (Gee, 2000). Within the sociocultural model, humans are seen as creatures who have a unique capacity for communication and whose lives are normally led within groups, communities and societies based on shared ways of using language, ways of thinking, social practices, and tools for getting things done. Education is understood as a dialogic process between students and teachers whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are jointly constructed. Learning and development cannot be understood without taking into account the intrinsically social and communicative nature of human life (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The realization of the significance of social interaction for learning has been associated with the work of Vygotsky (1978), which has shifted the emphasis from an individualistic image of the developing child towards an image of the child as growing up in a community.

According to Vygotsky’s theory of social intelligence, all higher mental functions originate in the social environment (Chudowsky, Fall, & Webb, 2000). Through group
discussions, in the process of working with a more experienced and capable person, the child first constructs new knowledge, understandings, or solutions to problems that he or she could not accomplish independently. The child then internalizes the new understanding and skills. In discussion groups around literature, the different social and cultural backgrounds and perspectives that students bring to the group helps the members construct meaning around the text, first in the social context and then through an individual internalization process. Occasionally, conflicts arise when students voice different perspectives, understandings, and interpretations of text. Students develop higher order comprehension skills when they are given the opportunity to reconsider and review their own interpretations (Chan, Burtis, & Beretier, 1977).

There is a great deal of literature on the effectiveness of discussion practices like Shared Inquiry. Research suggests that engaging in such discussions helps students gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of a story (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1993; Noll, 1994; Reid, Cintorino, Crews, & Sullivan, 1994), improves text comprehension and helps students understand alternate points of view (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Palinscar, Brown, & Martin, 1987), helps students to make connections between a piece of literature and their own personal experience or prior knowledge (Leal, 1993; Reid, et al., 1994), and improves students’ motivation to understand a piece of literature (Amalsi, 1995b; Noll, 1994). Students can learn from academically productive discussions by building on each others’ ideas to construct new knowledge and understanding that they did not have prior to group work (Damon & Phelps, 1989), by explaining and justifying their positions, questioning their own beliefs, and seeking new information to help resolve disagreements and arguments (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1979), by recognizing and clarifying material in their own minds in the
process of giving explanations (Bargh & Schul, 1980), and by correcting misconceptions and filling in gaps in their understanding when receiving explanations (Webb & Palinscar, 1966). Much of the current research on response to literature suggests that significant and enjoyable learning can occur when the classroom respects the unique responses of readers, encouraging them to make meaning of texts in personally significant ways. This literature is explored further in chapter two. In the next section of this chapter, I describe how my research contributes to the research on classroom literature discussions.

**The Problems this Study Addresses and the Research Questions**

The research above suggests that book discussions can be a valuable academic experience. However, research on classroom discourse indicates that book discussions typically take the form of teacher initiation/student response/teacher evaluation “recitations” where students try to “get” the answer the teacher is leading them toward, and therefore, do not exercise their reasoning abilities or autonomy (Cazden, 2001; Greene & Ackerman, 1996; H. Mehan, 1979; O'Connor & Michaels, 1996). Research indicates that most classroom discourse is either lecture or recitation and that whole group discussion is a most underdeveloped and underused talk format in the United States (Cazden, 2001; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

A major hindrance is that book discussions can be quite challenging for teachers to lead. Research suggests that most teachers lack training and experience in leading academically productive discussions (Cazden, 2001; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). When discussions do take place, they tend to be unproductive if students do not yet have the social or academic skills to ask “good questions” to one another (Cohen, 1994; Cohen & Lotan, 1997; Michaels & Sohmer, 2001). Due to the improvisational nature of discussions, they can also be challenging to plan for and guide (Erickson, 1982; Goldenberg, 1992). Furthermore, it can be challenging to lead whole
group discussions with students from different backgrounds and levels of academic preparation. It can be particularly difficult to ensure that participation is equitably distributed (Cazden, 2001; O'Connor & Michaels, 1996). However, a number of studies on Shared Inquiry suggest that the approach has a significant, positive impact on student success. When teachers learn how to implement the approach and are given access to engaging literature, they have demonstrated great success in their ability to lead productive book discussions, teachers’ perceptions on their students’ academic achievement have risen, and students have demonstrated tremendous gains on tests where they must use evidence-based reasoning (e.g., Bird, 1984; Criscuola, 1994; Gasser, Smith, & Chapman, 1997; Heinl, 1988; A. Wheelock, 2000).

Missing from the research is an examination of how practicing teachers learn to lead Shared Inquiry. Haroutuntian Gordon (2009) examined how two graduate students in a teacher preparation program learned to pose questions in interpretive discussions similar to Shared Inquiry. Haroutunian Gordon, a university professor, served as an expert guiding the teachers through the practice. In my research, I worked alongside the teacher discovering with him how to do Shared Inquiry in his classroom. I arranged for the fourth grade teacher to learn the basic principles of Shared Inquiry through courses offered by the JGB Foundation. Still, just as the research suggests, it was challenging for the teacher to learn to lead this new discussion practice. The first intention of this research was to perform a case study on how the focus teacher learned to do Shared Inquiry in his classroom. The second intention was to explore how action research could support the teacher throughout the experience. The teacher was accustomed to teaching literature through a highly prescriptive, skill based mandated reading program. Thus, the third intention was to explore how Shared Inquiry worked when used as a supplement to the mandated reading program. Therefore, this study addressed the following questions:
How did the fourth grade teacher learn to facilitate Shared Inquiry in his classroom?

How did action research support the teacher?

How did the action research experience influence the teacher’s experience with Shared Inquiry?

How did the fourth grade students experience literacy in this classroom?

What literacy practices did the students learn through *Reading Street* (the mandated reading program)?

What literacy practices did students learn through Shared Inquiry?

Through Shared Inquiry, the teacher and his students learned a new way to interpret literature. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I describe different traditions in literature interpretation. I also examine what children learn through book discussions and I review research on Shared Inquiry. In chapter three, I describe the methodology used in this research. Chapters four through six describe my research findings. I first describe a lesson I observed around the mandated reading program. Then I describe the experiences the teacher and his students had as they learned to do Shared Inquiry, including the action research I did with the teacher. I describe in the findings chapters how academic engagement in Shared Inquiry is quite different from the engagement in the mandated reading program. In chapter seven, I complete my arguments about academic engagement. In the final pages, I address several implications I have drawn from this research. Overall, this research was founded on the sociocultural premise that everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings. Making sense of this complexity is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).
Chapter 2

A Review of Research on Literary Interpretation and Discussion

This study explored how a fourth grade teacher and his students learned the practice of Shared Inquiry. Through Shared Inquiry, the students learned a particular approach to literary interpretation. To be specific, students learned how to closely examine a literature selection and build an argument supported by evidence directly from the text. In this interpretive practice, students were never asked to consider the intent of the author, to share personal reactions to the text, or to compare the text to other literary pieces. Such responses are valued in other interpretive practices, however. Any text can be interpreted from multiple perspectives (S. Wolf, 2004). Literary theory implicitly informs and in many ways shapes the manner in which literature is taught in the classroom. At any given time, a predominant theory tends to influence literature instruction until it is displaced by newer theories (Appleman, 2000). Literature discussions offer students opportunities to explore interpretations of literature and respond at higher levels of abstract and critical thinking. The first section of this literature review will explore theories around literary interpretation and it will end with an analysis of the interpretive
practices that influence Shared Inquiry. The second section of this review will explore how students benefit from participating in discussions around literature.

**A Review of Theory around Literary Interpretation**

In the past twenty years, there have been extensive reviews of research and theory relevant to literary interpretation (Beach & Hynds, 1991; Galda, 1983; Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000; Martinez & Roser, 2002; L. R. Sipe, 1999) and a proliferation of books on this subject (K. E. Holland, Hungerford, & Ernst, 1993; Many & Cox, 1992; McClure & Kristo, 1996; Roser & Martinez, 1995; Short & Pierce, 1990). Many researchers have examined various reader responses to literature and have attempted to identify the sources of variation. These sources, which cover a range of possibilities, can be discussed in three general groups: those that locate the source of variation in the *text* itself (Cai, 1997; Nodelman, 1988; Squire, 1964), in the *reader* himself (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; Rosenblatt, 1978; Tompkins, 1980), or in the *context* in which the reading occurs (Cazden, 1988; Fish, 1980; L. R. Sipe, 1999). Several reviews of theory on response have been organized around these three groups (i.e., Galda, et al., 2000; Marshall, 2000; L. R. Sipe, 1999) Since this organizational structure remains useful and valid, this literature review will also focus on these groups. The goal of this section of the literature review will be to examine various theories on response and to offer a sample of studies that illustrate research through the different theoretical lenses. In later pages, I explore how discussion practices, like Shared Inquiry, influence interpretation and benefit students.

**Research on Text**

In any analysis of literary response, the text is always a critical element. Texts shape response at the most basic level. New Critical Theory, referred to by some as Formal Criticism (S. Wolf, 2004), is a text-centered theoretical model which achieved prominence in the 1940s
and 1950s and greatly influenced instruction in secondary and post secondary language arts classrooms (Beach, 1993). The New Critics hold that the text itself—its structure, imagery, ambiguity, and especially its meaning—should occupy the center of a reader’s attention, and neither the author’s intentions nor the ways a text affects the reader are important matters (McRae, 1988). The role of the reader in this formulation is to locate the meaning of the text within the structure of the text. Meaning is retrievable from the text alone. The text is seen as a static, unified, and complete receptacle of meaning and it is the responsibility of the reader to gain access to the meaning for correct interpretation to result (Beach, 1993). Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) maintain that any attempt to locate meaning in the reader’s own feelings is an affective fallacy, and any attempt to impute authorial intentions is an intentional fallacy.

Ultimately, to do a New Critical reading, the reader must ask, "How does this piece work?" New Critics—including John Crowe Ransom (1941), Rene Wellek (1956), Austin Warren (1956), William Wimsatt (1954), Monroe Beardsley (1958), and others-- posit that every text is autonomous. That is, a text is a vessel complete within itself, written for its own sake, unified in its form, and independent of the author in every respect. The New Critics advocate precise, technical, objective analysis of the language of the text, particularly figurative language (Mallioux, 1989). They argue that each text has a central unity (Harker, 1992). The reader's job is to interpret the text, within the text alone, identifying how each element contributes to this unity. Together, the works of Richards (1929), Empson (1930), Brooks and Warren (1938), and Brooks (1949), suggest that to interpret a text, a reader must recognize that each text is spoken by a persona (narrator or speaker) who speaks in a tone expressing an attitude which tends to be either ironic, straightforward or ambiguous. Judgments of the value of a text must be based on the richness of the attitude and the complexity and the balance of the text. Analysis of these
elements leads the reader to an examination of themes. The quality of a selection of literature depends upon whether the themes are complex and whether or not they contribute to the central, unifying theme. The more complex the themes are, and the more closely they contribute to a central theme (unity), the better the work. This appeal to technical precision and objectivity serves to legitimate literary studies within the political arena of the university, rendering the study of literature a “scientific” endeavor of knowledge production equal to the natural and social sciences (Beach, 1993).

In this model, the teacher served as the primary explicator of the meaning of the text. Teachers assumed that texts were best regarded as well-wrought urns (Brooks, 1949), artistic objects endlessly rich and self-consistent, and that students should learn to appreciate their complexity. The responsibility of teachers was to instruct students on skills of close, concise, attentive analysis while discouraging interpretation of text resulting from individual student response. The role of the teacher was to correct “wrong” or ill-conceived responses, on the assumption that the meaning is in the text and reader’s job is to unlock it. This model gave rise to the primacy of the text in the literature classroom and to the authority of teachers as the definitive arbiters of meaning (Beach, 1993).

The New Critical orientation achieved theoretical prominence and most profoundly shaped instruction from the 1930s through the 1950s (Bleich, 1975; Purves, 1975; Purves & Beach, 1972; Rosenblatt, 1938; Squire, 1964; Squire & Applebee, 1968). Then a debate began over whether or not a reader can truly uncover authorial intent in a text. Hirsch (1967) distinguished between the significance of a literary text and its meaning. Hirsch asserted that a text may have multiple significances, for various readers at various time periods and places, but only one meaning—the meaning the author intended. Barthes (1977) wrote of the “death of the
author,” asserting the freedom of readers to make whatever they will of a text. Yet, despite dramatic shifts in interest in literary theory in the past forty years, teachers continued to employ methods reflecting New Critical orientations (Appleman, 2000; Beach & Hynds, 1991). Some teachers continued to focus primarily on a “close reading” of literary texts, on the assumption that texts may stand alone as organic wholes (Beach, 1993).

Today, authorial intent continues to be examined with school children, specifically in Beck, Mckeown, Hamilton, and Kucan’s (1997) technique of “questioning the author.” This technique, for use with both fiction and nonfiction, encourages teachers and students to read “as if the author were there to question” through such queries as “So, what is the author trying to tell us” or “Why is the author telling us that” (p.50). Most likely, the New Critics would accuse Beck, Mckeown, Hamilton, and Kucan of the crime of intentional fallacy for attempting to think that they could uncover an author’s true intentions.

Overall, the New Critics hold that texts are considered discrete entities containing an unchanging meaning that a careful reader can discover. Individual constructions of a text are definitive and allow little room for alternative constructions. This interpretive practice leaves many questions unresolved. For example, how do readers’ practices, personal expectations, and attitudes affect their response? This question is addressed in the research on reader response which is examined in the next section.

**Research on Readers**

While New Critical Theory achieved prominence from the 1930s through the 1950s, it came to be associated with “determinate meanings, teacher dominated, vertically oriented (top down) classroom discussions, and relative student passivity” (Knapp, 2002, p. 718). Reader response theorists, such as Rosenblatt (1938), Harding (1962), Britton (1970), Holland (1968),
and others, rejected the assumptions of the New Critics. It was their view that in the act of
discouraging expression and attention to differences in individual response, the New Critics
failed to consider the role of the reader in divining meaning. As a consequence of their
commitment to the individual, instructors began to move away from a focus on textual authority
toward greater consideration of the role of the reader.

Questions about the reader’s role in making sense of literary texts were asked at least as
early as the late 1920s. Richards (1929) raised many of these questions in *Practical Criticism*,
one of the first experimental looks at how individual readers respond to literature. Richards
asked his college students to “respond freely” to poetry read in his classes. He then categorized a
range of difficulties students encountered in understanding poetry, particularly the failure of
students to explore or extend their thinking beyond “stock responses.” While Richards’ study
was still grounded in New Critical, text-centered assumptions, he contended that “the personal
situation of the reader inevitably (and within limits rightly) affects his reading” (p.277). This
statement added credibility to the role of the reader in constituting meaning. A few years later,
Rosenblatt (1938) introduced the notion that it is important for the teacher to avoid imposing any
"preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work” (p.66). However, New
Critical thinking continued to prevail until the 1960s and early 1970s when a paradigm shift
occurred marking a transition from viewing the text as authority to a view that focused on the
reader's relationship with text (C. Cooper, 1985). The idea that there is a single, fixed meaning
inherent in every literary work was rejected.

Reader response theorists are concerned not just with a generalized reader but with
particular, individual readers and interpretations. Rosenblatt (1938), Iser (1978), Fish (1980),
and other reader response theorists, view reading as an interaction or transaction between the
reader and the text, “recognizing that the reader’s unique perspective will greatly influence the shape a literary work takes in his mind but also granting that the work itself has power to affect his responses, guiding him in some directions and steering him away from others” (Probst, 1994, p. 22). Reader-response theorists argue that a literary work cannot be understood apart from its “effects” on the reader, or the way in which the child reacts to something that has been read or listened to (J. D. Cooper, 1993; Tompkins, 1980). According to Tompkins, the “effects” of a text, psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of a text’s meaning, since that meaning has no existence outside of its realization in the mind of the reader. The effect a text has on a reader begins before reading as one thinks about what is about to be read and continues during and after reading (Martinez & Roser, 1991). Overall, reader response theory is based upon two assumptions: First, readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text. Rather, they actively find meaning in the material read. Second, the role of the reader cannot be omitted from an understanding of literature.

Reader response theorists consider several questions. For example: what different processes operate during reading? Or, what types of responses are readers likely to make? Some examine the stances or orientations readers bring to literary texts. Other reader response theorists question the types of strategies readers use in responding to literature. They may consider how a reader’s knowledge, ability, attitude, interest, personality, or purpose in reading, influence his response. More specifically, they may examine the influence of a reader’s personal knowledge of textual and social conventions and his reading experiences in the home and school (Beach & Hynds, 1991).

There is very little research on reader response theory that does not make use of the work of Louise Rosenblatt (e.g., Beach & Hynds, 1991; Marshall, 2000; Probst, 2003; Sandora, 1995;
L. R. Sipe, 1999). As previously stated, in the midst of the prominence of New Criticism, Rosenblatt proposed a different model for literary analysis in contrast to the New Critical view that all meaning resides in the text. Rosenblatt (1938) put forth the notion that the uniqueness of individual readers shapes their understandings of a text. Because readers differ, because they bring to texts different histories, beliefs, values, contexts, and purposes, their readings must inevitably differ. Meaning, she proposed, does not rely purely and simply within a text, to be extracted whole and complete; rather, it lies in the transaction between reader and text.

According to this transactional view, Rosenblatt observed that “… the human being is not seen as a separate entity, acting upon the environment, nor the environment as acting on the organism, but both as parts or aspects of a total event” (1978, p. 98). Thus, researchers must look not only at the characteristics of texts if they wish to understand literary experience, but also at people reading texts.

Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional view of literary response distinguishes between two ways to read a text, aesthetic reading and efferent reading. In aesthetic reading, primary attention is directed to that which we are experiencing, thinking, and feeling while we are reading. In efferent reading, a nonliterary reading, we seek to acquire information from the text. Rosenblatt believes that we can switch positions during reading and read something aesthetically that was intended by the author to be read efferently. She explains the following relationship between reader and text-- “reading is always a particular event involving a particular reader at a particular time under particular circumstances” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 445). As such, readers may create different meanings when transacting with the same text at different times. Yet, Rosenblatt also argues that an efferent reading of those texts that are meant to be read aesthetically will impoverish the reading experience and undermine a fully developed understanding of the
responses made possible by the text. Aesthetic reading takes place within what Rosenblatt describes as a “transactional” framework. This framework produces a “triadic relationship” in which the reader, the text, and the “poem”—what the reader creates as “the literary work or the evocation corresponding to the text” (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 103)—all participate, each influenced by the others, as aspects of a single integrated process.

Rosenblatt first promoted reader response theory in 1938, yet her work continues to influence literature instruction and reader response theory today. Reader response theory calls for a different approach to instruction and a new role for the teacher (C. Cooper, 1985). The new approach emphasizes the value of literature for self-knowledge and for understanding others. It insists on the importance of individual consciousness. In classroom teaching, it shifts emphasis away from the critical authority and received knowledge of the teacher toward elaboration and evaluation of personal responses from the students. When children are given the opportunity to engage in response activities, they develop a deeper understanding of the text and may relate what they have read to their own personal experience (T. Gambrell, 1986; Hickman, 1983). Through this process, individuals learn to construct or comprehend meaning (Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983).

Reader response theory has stimulated a great deal of research on the unique responses children have to literature. One line of research examines the expectations, attitudes, and practices of readers. For example, Sipe (1998) describes how four first and second graders differed in the responses they offer during story time discussions. One reader was very logical, using close textual analysis and inter-textual references to bolster her arguments during read-aloud time. Another used texts to generate creative activities. A third reader discussed themes he perceived. A fourth used stories as springboards for theatrical performances. McGinley and
Kamberelis (1996) also present rich descriptions of two third and fourth grade readers who varied considerably in style in terms of how they used their reading. One used his literary experience to help him understand the community in which he lived, the other to help her imagine her future. Sims (1983) linked response to culture in a case study of a young African American girl’s responses to books by and about African Americans. Sims found that the young girl responded most positively to literature that related most to her own experience as an African American girl, especially to Black female characters with whom she could identify. These last two studies are examples of how research has come to explore how response styles might be connected to readers’ lives both within and beyond the classroom (Galda & Beach, 2004).

Researchers have also explored how readers’ expectations for characters’ actions influence their responses (Galda & Beach, 2004). Readers have expectations for how people ought to behave. These expectations are shaped by the cultures in which they live and work. For example, Mellor and Patterson (2000) describe how students in multicultural, multiracial classrooms in Australia and the United Kingdom responded to plays and poetry of William Shakespeare. Students, who themselves were occasionally discriminated against, who read *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, commonly produced readings of these plays as racist and sexist. On a similar line, ample research has described how even young children become involved with characters, often comparing character behavior with their own (Hancock, 1993; McGee, 1992a). Shine and Roser (1999) document how preschoolers respond to fantasy, realistic, poetic, and informational picture books. They find that in children’s responses to all of these genres, personal associations to the characters, events, images, and topics seem to form the basis for interpretation for some of the youngest readers.
Not all readers respond positively to characters in a text. Galda (1983) notes that readers reject the actions of characters when those actions do not correspond to their own life experience. For example, in Galda’s examination of the response to literature of three fifth grade students, one student felt as though several parts of the story in *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1977) do not “fit in” because she was reluctant to assimilate or accommodate experiences outside of her own reality. Enciso (1994) connected this type of response to cultural practice when she documented how some readers might resist or reject a text that does not reflect their own cultural expectations. Her study of a classroom discussion of *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1991) reveals how literature discussions can help both teachers and students understand their own and others’ cultural and social identities. When Beach (1997) asked suburban high school students to respond to a range of different multicultural texts, he found they often took a stance of resistance to the literature due to their reluctance to explore issues of racism and white privilege within their suburban culture. This research demonstrates how literature can provide the symbolic material through which students may begin to address the ways they see themselves and others, though the response is not always positive.

Another line of research explores the types of inter-textual connections that individual readers make. Research on inter-textual connections examines how the meaning of one text shapes the meaning of another. Readers continually make connections between what they are currently reading and other texts they know. They make links between their history as readers and what is currently in front of them, whether they are reading a scholarly article or a piece of fiction. Researchers in literacy have made extensive use of the construct of inter-textuality (e.g., Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Short, 1992; L. R. Sipe, 1998; Sumara, 1996) Sipe’s (1996) work, focusing on the construction of literary understanding by first and
second graders, found that of 4,165 conversational turns by the children during 45 storybook read aloud discussions, one out of every ten of the turns was an inter-textual connection. Keene and Zimmermann (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, 2007) stress that “good readers” make inter-textual connections when they read; specifically, they make text to text connections, text to self connections, and text to world connections. The role of the teacher is to model the connections they make while they read and encourage their students to do the same. Keene and Zimmermann’s theory has become very popular among elementary school reading teachers. Yet, according to Langer (1995), “Too often, notions of student response are trivialized, used in a limited fashion to refer only to thoughts about a student’s life that connect with the work being read.” While a teacher who encourages her students to make inter-textual connections may have a more talkative class, talk alone is not necessarily an indication of quality learning. This is an interesting subject that will be considered in greater detail in the second section of this literature review.

Other research has addressed how readers’ responses reflect their cultural models or discourses (Beach, 1997; Gee, 2000). In one such study (Beach, 1995), students in advanced and regular 10th and 11th grade classes wrote responses to a story about advanced and regular high school characters. Beach found that student culture shapes how they respond to literature. The advanced and regular students differed in their responses to the story, differences reflecting their cultural models of schooling associated with the ability grouping system and student motivation. The advanced students attributed the fact that the story’s main character is a regular student to their perception of him as unmotivated, lazy, and lacking social skills. The regular students perceived themselves as satisfied with being in the regular class and not having to cope with the challenges of an advanced class. Through their responses, they make clear their allegiances to
their separate ability-grouping worlds. Similarly, another study demonstrates how differences in responses can reflect differences in students’ sociocultural experiences related to socioeconomic status. In a comparison of working class versus middle class high schools students’ responses to poetry, Hemphill (1999) finds that, in general, working class students focus more on speakers’ actions and thoughts, while middle class students focus more on thematic meanings consistent with the goals of literature instruction. Together, this research indicates that response to literature is influenced by a reader’s social milieu.

This research stands as examples of the work that has been done within this theoretical lens. Many of the studies reviewed in this section explore how individual response style is influenced by social factors. Researchers and practitioners are giving increased attention to the various social contexts that surround texts and readers and how these contexts influence response to literature. This research will be further explored in the next section of this review.

**Research on Social Context**

Research today has moved well beyond generalized notions of text and reader. Researchers who study reader response through a sociocultural lens tend to view the reader-text transaction as far more complex and embedded in multiple worlds than researchers may have realized in the past. Whereas reader response theory once focused mostly on how meaning is shaped autonomously in the mind of the reader, sociocultural theorists examine how both the classroom environment and the world outside of the school shapes response, including children’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds, their families and neighborhoods, and the all-pervasive “popular” culture (L. R. Sipe, 1999). Thus, a major underpinning of this body of research is on the social nature of learning. Learning is embedded within social contexts and occurs as the individual interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment.
Sociocultural theory evolved from the work of Vygotsky (1978) who considered the vital role that social development and the larger environment plays in shaping and clarifying language and thought. According to Vygotsky, the construction of knowledge and understanding is inherently a social activity. The child’s interactions with other people, notably those who are more advanced and capable members of the society in which the child is growing up, mediate the child’s encounters with the world-to-be-learned about. Gee (1996) has contributed to the sociocultural perspective with the notion that students’ and teachers’ voices and experiences, learned within the primary communities (those inside of the school) and secondary communities (those on the outside) to which they belong, make a contribution to what is learned and how it is learned. It is largely from these diverse contexts that notions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and effective communication gain their meaning. As a result of this thinking, earlier perceptions of texts, readers, and contexts have expanded. The current focus on the way different sociocultural contexts influence the reader seems to represent a new trend in teaching. Teachers and researchers are providing increased opportunities for learners to work together in social contexts to untangle complexities, solve problems, and construct meanings (Martinez & Roser, 2003).

The empirical research which explores how social contexts shape reader response is built on two sets of related assumptions (Marshall, 2000). First, “the research assumes that the conventions of schooling have an enormous influence on the kinds of literary response that students will come to see as appropriate and even natural” (p.393). These conventions specify and privilege particular ways of talking (Cazden, 1988; H. Mehan, 1979) and writing (A. N. Applebee, 1981, 1984), and almost always include the demand for evaluation of particular students’ performance (Purves, 1981). Schools are a primary vehicle for the introduction of a
culture’s literature to students (R. Applebee, 1973; Scholes & Kellogg, 1968), and thus occupy a powerful position in introducing a culture’s preferred modes of literary response (Purves, 1973). The second set of assumptions, somewhat broader than the first, and drawn directly from Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch’s (1991) notions of sociocultural theory, holds that “individual responses to literature will always be influenced by the norms, values, and preoccupations of a reader’s cultural context, that these are internalized by readers and become the intellectual tools with which responses are built” (p.393). A reader’s culture, in other words, is both outside and, in some ways, inside the reader, and thus constitutes the material of which response themselves are made.

Sipe (1999) suggests that we might think of the contexts in which children respond to literature as a series of nested boxes or concentric circles, ranging from the particulars of any given situation (the smallest box or circle), to the total classroom context, to the world outside of school, including children’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds, their families and neighborhoods, and the all-pervasive “popular” culture. The study of the complex interaction among all these contexts results in a richly textured description of literary response.
Sipe (1999) allows us to explore how a student's interpretation of a read-aloud is influenced by other contexts. In the above model, the classroom read-aloud is within the innermost circle. Sipe suggests that there are always explicit and implicit rules for read-alouds. Children are often seated on a carpet in a special area of the classroom, surrounded by bookshelves containing the classroom's library of trade books. These children and their teacher have come to an understanding about how to listen to a story and how to read a story aloud. The class has conversational norms about interrupting and when and how to speak. This complex set of rules and expectations—the immediate social context of the read-aloud—is largely determinative of what counts as response in this situation. Indeed, responses that are accepted and even encouraged by the teacher may be rejected as off-task behavior in other read-aloud contexts led by other teachers. Increasing numbers of studies have explored how the sometimes implicit set of rules and expectations that govern how literature is enacted in a particular
classroom shape response. Fish (1980) described how the interpretive community in which readers exist shape the strategies of individual readers. In their examination of responses to literature in the classroom, Hickman (1981) and Kiefer (1983) point to the influence of peer pressure and interaction along with the crucial influence of the teacher in shaping response. Others, such as Many and Wiseman’s (1992) research on the quality of literature discussions and Raphael and McMahon’s (1994) research on book clubs, describe how instructional practices enacted by the teacher serve to set the agenda for a class, guiding not only how students respond but also how they read.

The read-aloud situation is nested within a larger classroom context, the second innermost circle. For instance, the physical arrangement of the entire classroom and the implicit and explicit rules for behavior certainly have an effect on children’s experiences with literature. The ways in which literature is talked about, experienced, and appreciated outside the read-aloud situation also influence the experience. Each classroom no doubt has its own interpretive community. This interpretive community is formed anew from year to year, since teachers usually have a different set of children each September. Fish (1980) is the major theorist who argues for the centrality of the “interpretive communities” to which readers belong—communities that shape the strategies and assumptions of individual readers, even determining what gets counted as literature and thus what gets read in literary ways.

The most outer region of Sipe’s (1999) model considers the world outside of the school. One area under active investigation is how culture shapes, constrains, and enables literary response. Children with various cultural backgrounds bring a great diversity of experience to their classrooms. The culture of the classroom may actively support or clash with the children’s family and neighborhood culture. Just as no single piece of literature can adequately convey the
complexities of any given culture, no single representative of a culture can adequately speak for all its members. As Cazden (1988) has shown, even the basic concept of narrative or story may be significantly different for various cultural groups. For example, what is characterized as a “good story” may vary across cultures. Popular culture has a tremendous influence on literary response. In the United States, people are surrounded by the popular culture experienced through television, news media, movies, and commercial enterprise in general. Children can be greatly influenced by popular culture and they bring this experience into classrooms. Often, children first experience traditional fairy tales and folk tales in video, movie, and cartoon versions.

It appears that there are cross-cultural and cross-national differences among the ways that many young children are introduced to literature and literacy outside of the school. For example, the research on family literacy practices (e.g., Baker, Serpell, & Sonnenschein, 1995; Darling & Hayes, 1989; Heath, 1983; McKee & Rhett, 1995; Victoria Purcell-Gates, 2000; Taylor, 1993; Yaden & Paratore, 2003) suggests that non-middle class families are distinguished by the non-mainstream practices they use to foster children’s language and literacy development. Investigating response in these types of non-school contexts would provide additional knowledge about the range of literary response and the influence of social context on response. In sum, all of the factors Sipe (1999) considers make it important to contextualize children’s responses to literature and to seek to understand the ways in which a diversity of responses can enrich literary discussion and interpretation. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that the contextualization of response will likely mean the development of “local, small-scale theories” of response rather than “broad, general theories” (p.11).
Research today has gone well beyond simple notions of texts, readers, and contexts. Galda and Beach (2004) suggest that the research agenda for the next few years will involve exploring the multifaceted sociocultural nature of response and what that means for instruction. Researchers who study response from a sociocultural frame take for granted the complexities of the reader-text transaction that is embedded in multiple worlds. Teachers, too, recognize the care with which this transaction must be negotiated. What teachers say and do, the texts they choose, how they choose them, and the tasks they set up for the students all affect this transaction. By creating opportunities for students to read and engage in rigorous discussion, they promote higher levels of thinking in the classroom. In the 1920s, progressive educator Vivian Thayer found discussion to be invaluable and wrote, “The give and take of class discussion helps test conclusions and generates ideas that would otherwise remain unborn, opening up new territories for exploration [and] revealing the need of more intensive cultivation of ground already broken” (Thayer, 1928, p. 320). Contemporary researchers and scholars, such Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, Courtney Cazden, Maryann Eeds, and Ralph Peterson, continue to advocate for more frequent use of discussion or conversation in the classroom. Yet, although educators have advocated for this type of teaching for many years, it seems to be discussed more than done. The next section of this literature review will give further consideration to this notion and argue in favor of providing children the opportunity to engage in rigorous discussions, like Shared Inquiry, the practice examined in this research.

Shared Inquiry is a discussion practice informed by text and context centered theories of literature interpretation. On the one hand, students are asked to closely examine a text and consider how the piece conveys meaning in order to formulate a response to the guiding interpretive question. However, the practice is not so rigid that students can only look within the
text itself to formulate an interpretation. Students also have the opportunity to discuss and find meaning in literature within an interpretive community. Students learn to give full consideration to the ideas of others, to weigh the merits of opposing arguments, and to modify their initial opinions as evidence demands (Anne Wheelock, 1999). Within the support of the classroom community, they gain experience in communicating complex ideas and in supporting, testing, and expanding their own thoughts.

**Review of Research on Discussion around Literature**

This section of the literature review will further consider research on literature instruction, with a focus on research on discussion of literature. I begin with a review of research of how literature discussions often appear. In many classrooms, teachers are the primary evaluator of literary meaning. Their role is to transmit knowledge to students. Thus, a *transmission* approach to instruction is in place. In an alternative scenario, the teacher becomes a *facilitator* whose role is to provide students the opportunity to formulate their own thinking rather than passively absorb the thinking of another. Here, a constructivist approach to learning is in place. Children in this environment take a more active role in their instruction.

**Classroom Discussion around Literature**

Classroom discourse is traditionally dominated by teachers who ask a question, elicit one student’s response, and then evaluate the response (Cazden, 2001). The teacher is in control of the exchange and reserves the right to call on students, allocate turns to speak, organize and orchestrate discussion (Blanton, Wood, & Taylor, 2007; Raphael, et al., 1995; Raphael et al., 1992; D. Wells, 1995). In the classic study on the structure of talk in a classroom of children in their first year of school, Mehan (1979) developed a detailed description of the classroom lesson as a sequentially and hierarchically organized structure with a three-part *Initiate- Respond-
Evaluate (I-R-E) exchange as its basic unit. In the IRE, a teacher initiation (I) is followed by a student reply (R), followed by an evaluation of this reply (E) by the teacher. Wells (1993) refers to a similar construct as *Initiation, Response, Follow-up*. Mehan notes that being “right” in the classroom requires a student to respond to a teacher’s initiation not only with the correct content, but also with the correct timing and communicative conventions; otherwise the student’s response may be overlooked. Michaels, O'Connor, Williams Hall, and Resnick (2002) claim that this largely accounts for the “robust finding that teachers talk 2/3 of the time: they get 2 of the 3 slots, asking the questions, doing the evaluating” (p.47). As will be further elaborated upon below, within the context of classroom discussions, teachers tend to dominate the discussion leaving little room for students to share and elaborate upon their thinking.

**A transmission approach to learning.**

The I-R-E exchange is supported when one assumes that the primary role of the teacher is to transmit information to students. The I-R-E exchange is one instantiation of the *transmission* model of teaching. When learning is understood to occur primarily through the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, a successful student is one who is able to demonstrate that he has mastered the knowledge his teachers have provided. In many classrooms, the transmission approach is clearly evident in discussions around literature when teachers dominate the interaction. As Geekie and Raban (1993) found, teachers dominate the discussion by asking most of the questions and making most of the requests for information. They choose the topics for discussion and decide how those topics are to be developed. The problem here is that the questions teachers ask are frequently not questions which encourage children to make genuine contributions to class discussions. Instead, they require children to display knowledge the teacher has taught them. Barnes (1969) examined teacher questions and found a predominance
of factual over reasoning questions which indicates that teachers are not encouraging pupils to participate actively and think for themselves. More recently, Nystrand (1997) reported in a large study of eighth and ninth grade English language arts classes that 85% of the instruction observed was some combination of lecture, recitation, and seatwork. Argues Smagorinsky, (2002),

    Students have little to say in deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong, meaningful or not meaningful. Their role is to show that they’ve received the information and can throw it back in the same form. Cynics have used such unseemly analogies as “regurgitation” or mindless metaphors as “parroting” to describe the expectations for students under a transmission pedagogy. (p.70)

Thus, in many classrooms, discourse has more to do with maintenance of control and management of social relations and less to do with pupil learning (Coles, 1995). Very often, teachers control the language in the classroom and use their power to determine what constitutes valid knowledge.

    Within the I-R-E exchange, students must have certain discourse strategies and skills to perform well. This is a prime example of literacy as a social practice. In addition to knowing when and how to respond, students have to understand what kinds of questions teachers are asking when they initiate the sequence. Specifically, the questions that dominate the initiation in elementary classrooms are often “known-answer questions” (Cazden & Mehan, 1989). These questions function as indirect requests for students to display knowledge so that the teacher can test what the students know rather than teach them something new (Mehan, 1979). However, this type of question is foreign to many students entering school, particularly to students from
non-middle class homes (Heath, 1983), making it difficult for them to participate, not because they do not know the answers, but because they do not understand the question.

As Michaels, O'Connor, Williams Hall, and Resnick (2002) point out, it is not always the case that “the sequence of moves in an I-R-E is in itself inherently unproductive” (p.2). Rather, there are many times when the direct, transmission approach to instruction is quite necessary, appropriate, and unavoidable. For instance, the I-R-E exchange is particularly well suited for occasions when incorrect information can be replaced with the right answers. The structure of the sequence allows the teacher to maintain control over the flow of information in order to advance learning. Writes Michaels et al., “Both the topic of the Initiation move (the teacher's questions) and the content of the Evaluation move allow the teacher to advance the intended topic of discussion or learning. In addition, they allow her to check on the status of knowledge, awareness, and attention of students by calling on individuals and positing particular questions” (p.2). Goldenberg (1992) identifies areas where explicit instruction is necessary as “well structured skill and knowledge domains” (p.324). According to Goldenberg, explicit instruction is necessary when the teacher must provide step-by-step instructions, model procedures, guide practice, and give feedback. For instance, students benefit from explicit instruction when learning to perform mathematical computations, explicit reading comprehension strategies, map reading, reading decoding, and when learning conventions of punctuation and grammar.

The I-R-E exchange presents a frustrating situation when students have little opportunity to raise topics of interest, engage in profound thinking, or collaborate in critical problem solving, if this is the goal of instruction. A number of studies have been done on the effect of I-R-E on learning in language arts classrooms. Dillon and Searle (1981) and Dyson and Genishi (1983)
show that this paradigm, particularly in the primary grades, allows for little or no student-initiated talk, little or no interpretation or reflection on the students’ part, and very little development of spontaneous reasoning. DeStefano, Pepinski and Sanders (1982) investigated how first grade children at different reading levels acquire rules of discourse appropriate to becoming literate. In the middle reading group and particularly in the low group, “there were few open bids by the teacher for initiating talk and for the most part student discourse consisted of responses to the teacher’s nominations for them to talk, and [often only gave] one-word answers” (p.116). Moreover, “teacher-initiated discourse during the reading instruction was over 90%, whereas student initiated was only 9%” (p.109). DeStefano et al. concluded that the students learned a major rule of discourse in the reading group- the teacher is in control. Students learned to volunteer no personal information, to initiate few exchanges, and to respond to the teacher’s initiation with the one-word answer she seemed to expect. Most interesting was their conclusion that there was no evidence that the students were helped to perceive and comprehend the coherent text they were reading. The teacher seemed more interested in how the children behaved and the rules of how to acquire literacy rather than helping them to gain understanding of the text.

The I-R-E mode of teaching may unintentionally impose penalties on some students. Evidence suggests low achieving readers may be disadvantaged by discourse patterns that do not encourage comprehension. Collins (1982) reported that the high group of first graders spent 70% of the instruction time on comprehension while the low group spent only 37%. Time spent on decoding and vocabulary drill was 17% and 47% respectively. Mason (1983) found that high achieving readers were given far more text-level comprehension instruction than low achieving readers. Gambrell, Wilson, and Gantt (1981) reported that good readers received isolated word or
letter-sound instruction about 7% of the time, while poor readers spent 17% of their time in this type of instruction. Good readers were instructed with more extended text (sentences, paragraphs, stories) 57% of the time and poor readers only 22% of the time. Allington (1984) concluded that poor readers seem to be “presented with proportionally more activities (e.g., word study, drill, worksheets) other than contextual reading during reading group sessions than do other readers” (p.94). Other studies bear evidence that “teachers ask relatively more simple, factual questions of children in low groups and relatively fewer questions requiring reasoning” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 90).

Overall, the approaches that are used with struggling readers seem less likely to emphasize comprehension and critical thinking, and more likely to focus on decoding strategies. These findings suggest that low readers are receiving instruction that has skill emphasis, low-level questioning, little contextual reading, and limited teacher-student interactions in which there is little discussion and initiation of ideas on the student’s part. As Dowhower and Spedel suggest, (1989) “Poor readers are given a very different type of instruction than that generally advocated and given to high achievers. Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in these practices is that more holistic comprehension instruction will not benefit the low achiever and that such children simply need more drill and skill instruction and teacher control. (p.52) Instruction on basic decoding skills is unquestionably important. However, all readers benefit from the opportunity to think, reason, comprehend, and understand important ideas around literature. Write Michaels, O'Connor, Williams Hall et al.(2002), “In the end, the use of known-answer questions and the use of recitation and the I-R-E structure must be judged against the teacher’s academic purposes and the kind of student learning that occurs” (p.2).
Schools tend to place a great deal of emphasis on correctness and on gathering of information. The transmission model of learning defines “knowing” as remembering and producing the “right answer”. The act of acquiring information—facts, dates, memorized judgments, and the like—amounts to significant learning. When this is the case, children are conditioned to view literature discussions as a time to prove what they have learned from the text. The literary experience is often reduced to discrete, isolable, measurable units. To foster richer comprehension, the literary experience should involve much more than the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student.

A constructivist approach to learning.

The transmission approach to education defines knowing as remembering and producing a right answer, an answer transmitted by the teacher or the textbook. Alternatively, constructivism is a theory about how individuals learn based on the belief that we learn best when we are able to construct, or piece together, our own understandings rather than passively absorbing information (Nichols, 2006). Probst (2003) makes the case that, “Much of the current research in response to literature suggests that significant and enjoyable learning can occur when the classroom respects the unique responses of readers, encouraging them to make meaning of texts in personally significant ways” (p.823). This body of research is heavily influenced by the reader-response approach to the teaching of literature which allows students to employ a variety of interpretive strategies and encourages them to bring their personal experience to the text. Reader response theory calls for a new role for the teacher and a different approach to discussion around literature (C. Cooper, 1985). The teacher no longer plays the role of critical authoritarian and transmitter of knowledge. Rather, the teacher’s role is to encourage elaboration and evaluation of personal responses. Rather than the model of the teacher as the mediator of
meaning, this strategy establishes the role of the teacher as a *facilitator* of interpretation. The goal of discussion is to value literature for self-knowledge and personal interpretation. It insists on the importance of individual consciousness. When children are given the opportunity to engage in response activities, this helps them develop deeper understandings and relate what they have read to their own personal experiences (T. Gambrell, 1986; Hickman, 1983). It is through this process that individuals learn to *construct* meaning and to comprehend (Cullinan, et al., 1983).

**Constructivism informs sociocultural theory.**

It is important to point out that constructivist theory focuses upon *individual* learning whereas the sociocultural perspective emphasizes the important role of *social interaction* for knowledge construction and understanding. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social intelligence, all higher mental functions originate in the social environment. Through group discussion, in the process of working with a more experienced and capable person, the child constructs new knowledge, understandings, or solutions to problems that he or she could not accomplish independently. The child then internalizes the new understanding and skills. The different social and cultural backgrounds and perspectives that students bring to the group helps the members construct meaning around the text, first in the social context and then through an individual internalization process (Chudowsky, et al., 2000).

Thus, claims Raphael et al (1995), we must create classrooms where students engage in meaningful talk if we are to promote higher levels of thinking which is important for success both in and out of school. Wells (1995) describes these occasions, when there is meaningful discourse to promote higher levels of thinking, as “genuine dialogues.” In genuine dialogue, meanings are jointly constructed. Participants create new meanings through language that
emerges through collaboration. Dialogue occurs when participants gain a deeper insight into the issues being discussed, not just when they voice opinions. Participation is enhanced when there is a concern that all group members have opportunities to speak and previous speakers’ responses are acknowledged. Participants are afforded opportunities to ask and seek clarification. The dialogue is not dominated by a single individual. Wells states, “Genuine dialogues are collaborative and sound more like natural conversations… As in natural conversation, speakers choose when to speak, they tell about themselves, and they build on previous comments. The teacher is a participant sharing her reaction. The teacher asks questions, but these questions are genuine requests for information or clarification” (p.142).

Wells (1995) offers a number of conditions that must be in place in order for there to be genuine dialogue. First, teachers must trust that readers can find meaning in a text. When teachers value their students’ responses, literature discussion groups provide a safe place for children to use language to explore important ideas and issues. Second, in order for book discussions to resemble natural conversations, with the ebb and flow of shifting topics punctuated by students’ thoughts and questions, teachers must establish a community of learners. Insightful teachers invite all children to join in the conversation by creating a community where each member finds meaningful ways to use language to learn about themselves and the world of literature. Third, for the dialogue to be collaborative, teachers must view themselves as fellow readers and participants in book discussions. When teachers join the community, both they and their students share interpretations, make connections between literature and their own lives, and derive new insight. Finally, Wells emphasizes that genuine dialogue in a literature discussion requires time and patience. Under these circumstances, “grand conversations can emerge—instances of genuine dialogue that reveal the power of literature to move and inspire” (p.140).
The final pages of this review will offer a description of what students gain through productive book discussions. Classroom discussions are productive when they help students learn with deeper understanding (Doubler, McWilliams, & Michaels, 2011). When book discussions are most productive, students really listen to one another. Students work hard to explain their ideas and they use evidence to back up their explanations. They connect their ideas to those of others either by agreeing, disagreeing, or building upon their ideas. Students feel empowered to ask questions when they do not understand an idea. All children pursue the questions in depth and participate by explaining their ideas, listening carefully, asking questions, and connecting their ideas to those of others. Finally, Doubler, McWilliams, and Michaels suggest that when talk is productive, children actively revise their thinking as classmates share new ideas.

**What Children Learn through Productive Book Discussions**

Several recent reviews synthesize research on how classroom discussion affects reading comprehension (e.g., Almasi et al., 2004; Murphy, et al., 2009; Nystrand, 2006; Soter et al., 2008). Most of the research has been done at the middle and secondary levels. This review examines the research at the elementary level. Research on book discussions has described what children accomplish collectively as they talk about literature. Eeds and Wells (1989) identified a number of things children and adults accomplish working together as members of literature discussion groups: first, participants rely on one another as they construct and articulate meanings, even changing as they encounter different perspectives; second, children involved in literature discussion share personal stories, and, in the process of sharing, both grapple with how the story is personally significant for them and shape the significance of the text for others; third, Eeds and Wells found that children in the midst of a group inquiry process predict, hypothesize,
confirm, and disconfirm. Finally, the participants engage in group “critiquing” of stories, as they share their insights about how the author has crafted the text. In a similar fashion, Almasi (1995b) found in an investigation of fourth graders’ discussions of literature that discussants work together to resolve their “cognitive conflicts” (p.317)—the interpersonal conflicts, questions, and confusions that readers encounter when reading literature.

Just as the findings in this dissertation will suggest, when students first experience literature discussion groups, their responses tend to not be very elaborate and the interaction is limited (Amalsi, 1995b; L. B. Gambrell, 1987; Goatley & Raphael, 1992). After some experience, however, students begin to demonstrate improved comprehension and an ability to evaluate the text and the responses of others (Amalsi, 1995b; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Goatley, 1996). Evidence suggests that engaging in group discussions helps students gain understanding of the meaning of a story (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1993; Noll, 1994; Nystrand, 2006; Reid, et al., 1994), improves text comprehension and helps students understand alternate points of view (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Palinscar, et al., 1987), helps students to make connections between a piece of literature and their own personal experience or prior knowledge (Leal, 1993; Reid, et al., 1994), improves students’ motivation to understand a piece of literature (Amalsi, 1995a; Noll, 1994), and helps to teach students that social interaction is a normal part of understanding literature (Samway et al., 1991). Students can learn from high-quality discussions by building on each others’ ideas to arrive at insights they may not have devised prior to group work (Damon & Phelps, 1989), by explaining and justifying their positions, questioning their own beliefs, and seeking new information to help resolve disagreements and arguments (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1979), by recognizing and clarifying material in their own minds in the process of giving explanations (Bargh & Schul, 1980), and by correcting misconceptions and
filling in gaps in their understanding when receiving explanations (Webb & Palinscar, 1966). English language learners also benefit from the experience of participating in book discussions. Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) found that both fluent and limited English proficient students in three fifth and two fourth grade classrooms involved in instructional conversation scored significantly higher on both factual and interpretive comprehension than a control (i.e., read-and-study) group.

Research on first grade book discussions suggests that even young children are capable of producing elaborate and sophisticated responses to literature (McGee, 1992b). Children were able to construct meaning, share personal reactions, and demonstrate strategic reading behaviors such as hypothesizing, interpreting, predicting, confirming, generalizing, and evaluating. The research clearly indicates that reading and discussing children’s literature offers students opportunities to explore interpretations of literature and respond at higher levels of abstract and critical thinking. Kucan and Beck (1997) hypothesize that when students communicate their developing understanding of text ideas and listen as other students do the same, students not only derive a greater understanding of a text, but also learn to understand the process of constructing meaning from the text. Thus, according to Pontecorvo (1993), “forms of discourse become forms of thinking” (191).

Many different discussion practices are described in the language arts literature, including Socratic Seminars (Tredway, 1995), the Paideia Approach (Adler, 1982), Grand Conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), Literature Circles (Daniels & Steineke, 2004), Instructional Conversations (Goldenberg, 1992), Book Clubs (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995), Questioning the Author (Beck, et al., 1997), and Shared Inquiry (The Great Books Foundation, 1999). These approaches serve various purposes depending on the goals teachers set for their students. Shared
Inquiry, the discussion practice examined in this dissertation, asks students to take an analytic stance towards an interpretive question, a question which has at least two reasonable answers that can be supported with evidence from a text. The role of the teacher is not to push for consensus or a “correct” reading of the text, but rather to assist students in examining the evidence in the text for their claims and to help them build a compelling claim so that others can agree or disagree and point to supplementary or competing evidence (Michaels & Cazden, 2006). The overall objective is to instill in adults and children the habits of mind that characterize a self-reliant thinker, reader, and learner (Junior Great Books Foundation, 1999). In the pages that follow, I review research demonstrating how Shared Inquiry can be a productive discussion practice.

Research on Shared Inquiry

The Junior Great Books program consists of literature anthologies and a sequence of activities designed to prepare students for Shared Inquiry. The literature is considered authentic, challenging material that engages students and strengthens literacy learning (Au & Rafael, 1998; Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995; Roser, 1994). Research on the sequence of activities indicates that repeated reading of the texts improves readers’ oral reading skills and comprehension (Dowhower, 1987; Rasinski, 1990; Therrien, 2004). Shared Inquiry discussions have made a significant contribution to students’ reading, thinking, and learning skills (Allington, 2002; Keefer, Zeitz, & Resnick, 2000; Langer, 1995; Langer & Close, 2001; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Wenglinsky, 2004).

Research on the Junior Great Books program suggests that the approach has a significant, positive impact on how elementary level students perform on standardized achievement tests. A Great Books Foundation pilot study (Criscuola, 1994) found that third graders who used the
curriculum made significantly greater gains in their ability to support opinions about a reading selection with evidence from the text than students who did not receive the curriculum. This was evident in their discussion and written responses. Junior Great Books students also tended to score higher on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than students who received basic reading instruction (Criscuola, 1994). A number of additional studies also disclose improvement in test scores following use of the curriculum. In one study (Gasser, et al., 1997), a teacher implemented Junior Great Books along with other literature activities in his fifth-grade classroom and assessed students’ progress in shared inquiry discussion and written responses to interpretive questions. Students demonstrated marked progress in those areas and more than half received academic recognition for proficiency on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In another study (Kelly, 1996), when the curriculum was adopted as an integral part of the reading program in 27 classrooms, grades 2 through 6, substantial gains were seen on the Texas Learning Index. Fifth and sixth grade students showed even greater progress after two years in the program. In a low-income Chicago school (Chicago Panel on School Policy, 1997), students’ scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills increased 27 percent in reading between 1992 and 1997. This school was acclaimed as an important example of scholastic progress.

Overall, the research on student learning through the Junior Great Books program has found that students showed improvement on measures of literal and abstract reading comprehension (Biskin, Hoskisson, & Modlin, 1976; Heinl, 1988; Kelly, 1996; Murphy, et al., 2009; Waters, 2010) and on measures of critical thinking and higher level reasoning skills (Bird, 1984; Criscuola, 1994; Criscuola & Hare, 1992; Kelly, 1996; Murphy, et al., 2009; Soter, et al., 2008; Anne Wheelock, 1999). Students improved their expository writing in response to
literature (Sondel, 2009). Their self-esteem also improved as a result of sharing ideas in a respectful, collaborate atmosphere (Feiertag & Chernoff, 1987).

There is research suggesting that students with a range of reading abilities can participate and benefit from the Junior Great Books approach. Bird (1984) explored the impact of the curriculum on high-ability readers and found that they showed gains in critical thinking and reading scores on the Ross Test of Higher Cognitive Processes and the Worden Critical-Thinking/ Reading Appraisal Test. These students also demonstrated a more positive attitude towards reading on the Estes Attitude Scale. In the classroom that served as the setting for this research, the majority of the students were struggling readers. Heinl (1988) explored the impact of the Junior Great Books curriculum on lower-ability fifth grade readers and argued that these students, more than most, need to practice thinking skills associated with reading if they are to become better readers. Heinl found that the curriculum promoted improvement in the literal and inferential reading comprehension skills of the lower-ability readers, as demonstrated both on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and also the researcher’s test of literal and inferential questions.

Similarly, Michaels and Dudley-Marling (2007) reported a dramatic rise in standardized text scores after Junior Great Books was implemented for only six months in a high poverty school in South Bronx, New York. The dramatic rise was observed in both language arts and mathematics. Prior to the implementation of the program, an average of 22.6% of general education students were considered “far below” instructional standards. After six months, this percentage of students dropped to 1.6% (1 student). The teachers and administrators attributed the gains in literacy and math test scores to the school-wide implementation of the Junior Great Books Program and the on-going professional development they received.
There is also evidence that the program has challenged how teachers perceive at-risk students. Michaels and Dudley-Marling (2007) report that all of the teachers interviewed mentioned how intelligent the students are and how they seem more capable than previously assumed. Wheelock (1999) similarly found that the Junior Great Books curriculum altered teachers’ perceptions of their students. One teacher noted, "Initially, we were concerned about whether our kids could be successful using the program because they were below grade level" (p.49) When students were offered opportunities to read language-rich literature and participate in shared inquiry discussions, students with a wide range of reading skills began to surprise teachers. The teachers observed how students reacted to the stories with enthusiasm and learned to answer interpretive questions with opinions supporting by evidence from the text. As a result, teachers were forced to reassess student potential for learning. One teacher stated,

I was really surprised that it would work this well in this socioeconomic area. I thought it would be much more difficult. I have been surprised by students' answers. I've had [children with severe learning disabilities] give interesting, intuitive, thoughtful answers.

(p.50)

Overall, Wheelock found that the teachers realized that students who did not “shine” in traditional settings could think and communicate about literature in ways they had previously associated only with advanced students. This suggests that it is vital to listen to the voices of students who are members of subordinated groups. Feiertag and Chernoff (1987) also noted improvement in the students’ self esteem. From the very beginning, and continuing throughout the year, children uniformly appeared to feel equal to their peers. No longer were children only interested in the ideas of those thought by the class to be the “best” students. Children spoke freely and at great length. They were willing to take risks, and as their ability to take risks...
developed, so did the quality of their ideas. It appears that when students’ voices are undervalued in the classroom, they may feel oppressed by the learning process. A curriculum that encourages students to express themselves verbally in well directed classroom discussion can greatly enhance student learning (Kordalewski, 1999).

Although there is evidence demonstrating the benefit of discussion practices like Shared Inquiry, there is not as much demonstrated evidence of “how” teachers and students learn to participate in these practices. As this review demonstrates, many teachers find it challenging to get children to participate in discussions around literature in ways that move away from traditional classroom discourse toward more productive, authentic discussion. Haroutunian-Gordon (2009) conducted a case study on two graduate level education students and examined how the novice teachers learned to teach through discussion. Similar to the research in this dissertation, the work explores how the teachers engaged fourth graders in interpretive discussion. Although Haroutunian-Gordon does not formally label the interpretive discussions Shared Inquiry, the practice is referenced throughout the case study. Haroutunian-Gordon’s case study specifically examines how as the novice teachers learned to clarify their own questions about meaning, they became better listeners and leaders of the discussion. My own research differs from Haroutunian-Gordon’s work in many ways. My focus teacher was an experienced teacher. He used the Junior Great Books literature and sequence of activities to prepare students for discussion. My work focuses upon how both the teacher and the fourth grade students learned the practice of Shared Inquiry. My work also explores how action research was used to support the teacher as he learned to do the practice. Overall, my work contributes to the grand understanding about how teachers learn to engage students in productive book discussions. My work also contributes to the research on academic engagement; I consider how student academic
engagement in Shared Inquiry is quite different from engagement around the skill-based, mandated reading program in the focus classroom.

**Conclusion**

The first section of this literature review traces how reader response theory has been shaped over time, from the days when texts were central and the teacher determined the meaning of text, to a time when it became more acceptable for readers to interpret texts independently, to the sociocultural understanding that the reader-text transaction is far more complex and embedded in multiple worlds. The second section of this literature review considers the research on classroom discussions. When discussion around literature is used as an instructional tool in the classroom, the premise is that learning to read occurs within a sociocultural community. This review attempts to demonstrate the sociocultural premise that teachers can most successfully improve their students’ reading comprehension by creating opportunities for them to read and discuss literature in the company of others. Children have this opportunity in Shared Inquiry.

Cazden (2001) maintains that for social and intellectual reasons, engaging students in rigorous classroom discourse is more important than ever as a consequence of changes in the nature of the workplace and in civil society. Graduates must be competent in basic skills such as the ability to read and do math at the ninth grade level or higher, to formulate and test hypotheses, to communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and to use computers to execute tasks. In society, there is a greater demand for people to cooperate with others from different backgrounds. Cazden (1995) points out that social and economic developments in most advanced economies demand that schools engender “deeper understanding of knowledge, greater flexibility of skills, and more interpersonal competencies for all students than many of the elite achieved in the past” (p. 159). Add Westgate and Hughes (1997), “Communication, collaborative
learning, and group problem-solving are becoming more firmly established among the ‘transferable skills’ on which employers place emphasis and which figure ever more explicitly in curricular documents for every stage from pre-school to higher education” (p.129). Thus, Cazden (2001) states, “schools have a responsibility to create not only individual human capital for a healthy economy, but collective social capital for healthy communities as well” (p.5).

It does not serve our students well to spend their school days learning by rote various facts and procedures. Instead, there should be a greater emphasis on teaching students what Cazden (2001) refers to as “processes and strategies for learning and doing” (p.5). Teachers should be encouraged to add nontraditional discussion to the curriculum so as to stimulate and support higher level thinking. However, a major hindrance in the current drive toward school improvement results from the priority attached to meeting state standards and testing requirements. Kordalewski (1999) maintains, “In this context, ideas about classroom activity often center around prescribed student performance objectives that are to be reached” (p.3). As a result, teachers resort to traditional classroom discourse and student voices remain unheard. The standard I-R-E approach, so current in teaching from pre-school on through high school, and perhaps even college, is more of a directive approach than one promoting the active intellectual growth of the student.

Since fifth-century Greece, educators and philosophers have argued for a method of teaching that does more than impart knowledge and teach skills. The Socratic Method of training a mind to think critically and well is based upon the concept of promoting active participation of student and teacher in the learning process (Goldenberg, 1992). The objective should be the promotion of active discourse among students with the goal of promoting sound and creative minds. While the necessity of imparting basic skills requires a transmission approach to
instruction, whenever possible, facilitation of classroom discourse should be promoted to engage students in a process of active, constructive learning.
Chapter 3

Methodology

From a sociocultural perspective, reading is a social process. How children comprehend the texts they read emerges from social relationships among people: among teachers and students, among students, among parents, and among authors and readers (Bloome, 1985). Bloome (1985) states, “The social relationships involved in reading include establishing social groups and ways of interacting with others; gaining or maintaining status and social positions; and acquiring culturally appropriate ways of thinking, problem solving, valuing and feeling” (p.134). Shared Inquiry is a social literacy practice. In Shared Inquiry, students discuss and find meaning in literature within an interpretive community. With the support of the classroom community, they gain experience in communicating complex ideas and in supporting, testing, and expanding their own thoughts (Junior Great Books Foundation, 2006). This dissertation examines how a fourth grade teacher and his students learned to engage in Shared Inquiry. To make sense of how Junior Great Books contributed to the literacy practices in this fourth grade classroom, I also examined the mandated reading program used in this classroom. Thus, this study addressed the following questions:

How did the fourth grade teacher learn to facilitate Shared Inquiry in his classroom?
How did action research support the teacher?

How did the action research experience influence the teacher’s experience with Shared Inquiry?

How did the fourth grade students experience literacy in this classroom?

What literacy practices did the students learn through Reading Street (the mandated reading program)?

What literacy practices did students learn through Shared Inquiry?

Overall, this research is founded on the sociocultural premise that everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings; understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Although traditional, quantitative approaches to measurement are appropriate for evaluating activities and behaviors that can be counted or measured, they are less effective in analyzing complex, multidimensional characteristics of a phenomenon (Birnbaum, Emig, & Fisher, 2003). For this reason, case studies are often selected as a way to situate findings within a specific context.

**Methodological Approach**

**The Case Study**

Case studies are explorations of a single entity or phenomenon, such as an event process, organization, group, or individual (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Through close examination, case studies seek to understand a larger phenomenon. In this case study, the single entity is the Shared Inquiry discussion and the larger phenomenon is the social nature of the reading process. Rossman and Rallis (1998) further suggest that case studies are particularly useful for their rich description and heuristic value. By providing detail and complexity, case studies illuminate the
researcher’s understanding of the setting or event, thereby extending comprehension of the complexity of the event. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), “It is the messy complexity of human experience that leads researchers to do case studies in the qualitative or interpretive tradition” (p.3). A case study approach is one way researchers can seek to understand the complexity of the Shared Inquiry experience and how it contributes to an understanding of the social nature of the reading process.

A critical characteristic of case study research is that it is a study of a bounded system that could, for example, be a child, a teacher, or a classroom (Stake, 2000). Boundedness is important, because it defines what is excluded or included in the study. For example, if one fourth grade classroom’s experience with a basal reading program is the focus of study, the experience of the teacher and students in the neighboring fourth-grade classroom would not be considered participants within the bounded system. Merriam (1988) further defines four additional characteristics, beyond the issue of boundedness, that are essential when defining case study research. First, case studies are particularistic in that they are centered on a particular situation, program, event, phenomenon, or person. Second, they are descriptive in that the researcher gathers rich description of the object of study. Third, case studies are heuristic in that they enrich a reader’s understanding. Finally, case studies are inductive as the data drives the understandings that emerge from the study. In summary, a case study is defined as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p.16).

Researchers who use case study approaches hope to identify what is common as well as what is unique about the cases. However, the end product of a case study usually results in something unique. As Stake (1994) points out, this uniqueness is likely to be related to:
- The nature of the case;
- It’s historical background;
- The physical setting;
- Other contexts, including economic, political, legal, and aesthetic;
- Other cases through which this case is recognized;
- Those informants through which the case can be known. (p.238)

Stake (2000) identifies three types of case studies. An *intrinsic case study* is one that is undertaken because the researcher wants a better understanding of a particular case. This form of case study is not undertaken because it represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem. Rather, the researcher considers the particularity and ordinariness of the entity to be interesting. The purpose is not to come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon, such as teenage drug use. Moreover, the purpose is not to build a theory. Rather, in an educational setting for example, this type of case study is undertaken because of an *intrinsic* interest in a particular child, conference, or curriculum. For example, MacDonald, Adelman, and Kushner (1982) were interested in studying bilingual education in the United States. These British scholars carefully observed the Rafael Hernandez Elementary School in Boston, Massachusetts. The case study report offers a reconstruction of events and experiences at the school over the course of three weeks. The goal of this investigation was to portray the unique aspects of a particular bilingual school.

A second type of case study is an *instrumental case study* (Stake, 2000). An instrumental case study is done to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. Stake (2005) suggests, “The case is still looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its
ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps the researcher pursue the external interest” (p.445). The case may be seen as typical of other cases or not. In this situation, the choice of case is made to advance interest of that other interest. For example, Asmussen & Creswell (1997) conducted a study on how a college campus reacted to an incident in which a student attempted to fire a gun at his classmates. The purpose of this instrumental case study was to illuminate a larger problem of escalating campus violence involving guns in the United States.

When researchers have even less intrinsic interest in one particular case, they may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. The third type of case study is a collective case study (Stake, 2000). This is an instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar; redundancy and variety are important. The cases are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. For example, Kozol (1991) offers a collection of case studies to demonstrate extremes of wealth and poverty in America's public school system.

This study of Shared Inquiry in a fourth grade classroom is an intrinsic case study due to the fundamental interest in a particular instructional approach. The goal will be to gain insight into how the teachers and students interpret the Shared Inquiry experience and collaborate to find meaning in literary texts. These insights will be described in a written report. According to Stake (2000), in the final stage of data analysis, the researcher emerges from the social experience of observing the case to choreograph a report. The reader comes to know what is told as if he or she had experienced it. Writes Stake (2000), “According to constructivist theory, knowledge is socially constructed, and, in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers
assist readers in the construction of knowledge” (p.446). Thus, this written case study report attempts to offer vivid description to illustrate the complexity of the Shared Inquiry experience in one fourth grade classroom.

**The Microethnographic Perspective**

Ethnographic research describes what people in some particular place or status ordinarily do and the meanings they ascribe to what they do (Schram, 2003). Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris (2005) suggest that a microethnographic approach can be used to analyze the daily life in classrooms. This approach specifically recognizes that classrooms are complex places in which “teachers and students create and recreate, adopt and adapt, and engage in a full range of human interactions” (Bloome, et al., 2005, p.xvi). Teachers and students are viewed as active agents who act within the events, contexts, and settings in which they find themselves. Through a microethnographic lens, this dissertation seeks to describe the complex nature of the fourth grade classroom and how the teacher and students engage in Shared Inquiry.

Bloome et al. (2005) suggest that a microethnographic approach can be specifically used to foreground how people use language in the classroom. Bloome et al. have observed that language is at the center of what happens in classrooms: the language used by teachers and students, the language of texts and textbooks, the language of school and school district policies, the language of parents and children as they interact with each other and with educators, and myriad other uses of language. Language is both the object of classroom lessons (e.g., learning to read, write, and use academic discourse) as well as the means of learning (e.g., through classroom discussions and lectures, reading, and writing). Given the central role of language in people’s lives and in the construction of classroom events, understanding and attending to how language is used in the classroom is central to the microethnographic approach.
Bloome et al. (2005) offer an example of how a microethnographic perspective can be used to analyze a classroom discussion. The participants are a teacher and students in a seventh grade language arts classroom. The event in which they are engaged is a debate over where there is a “White” language and a “Black” language. Bloome et al. carefully analyze how the teacher and students use language to construct the event. Bloome et al.’s example of a discussion between a teacher and students could be considered a case. Using the transcript analysis as a springboard, Bloome et al. could illuminate their understanding of the event by delving into the detail and complexity of the experience.

A microethnographic approach is well suited for the study of the classroom language and literacy events analyzed in this case study. Basso (1974) and Heath (1983) define “literacy events” as social activities structured around ways of using and talking about text. Dyson and Genishi (1983) point out that language events are collaboratively constructed. As children come to participate and to interact within the shared practices of a group of people, they develop a sense of identity and belonging to that group. At the same time, the very ways of interacting that may be deemed appropriate and even necessary within particular groups may be deemed immature (i.e., not fully developed), morally problematic, or simply unpleasant by others. Thus, a Shared Inquiry discussion is a “literacy event” where students collaborate within a shared practice, develop a sense of identity and belonging, and learn appropriate ways of interacting. Through this lens, I examined how the fourth grade teacher learned to facilitate Shared Inquiry in his classroom and how the students experienced literacy on a daily basis in this classroom.

Action Research

Throughout the entire research process, I participated with the fourth grade teacher in action research (Stringer, 2007; Zeichner, 2001) on how to make Shared Inquiry most successful.
Noffke (1997) makes the case that teachers should be considered active members of the research community rather than something to study. According to Stringer (2007), “The primary purpose of action research is to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to ‘design’ an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness” (p.6). By engaging the teacher in Action Research, we collaborated to inquire over time how to effectively engage the students in Shared Inquiry. I characterize the action research I did with the teacher as a reflective process of progressive problem solving. Together, we explored the details of Shared Inquiry through a constant process of observation, reflection, and action. Although we focused most intensely upon the details of the Shared Inquiry discussions, we found it necessary to make a few adjustments to the pre-discussion activities to best prepare the students for the event. The following model represents how we engaged in our action research-

(Stringer, 2007, p. 9)

Together, we “looked” at the events of each week, we “thought” about the teacher’s experiences and addressed problems he faced, and we then took “action” by making changes we thought would improve both the pre-discussion activities and Shared Inquiry. Each week, the cycle began anew in our continued effort to make Shared Inquiry most successful.

In the following pages, I offer a detailed description of the research site and participants, how the Junior Great Books Program was implemented in the focus classroom, and how data was analyzed.
Research Site and Participants

This research was conducted during the Spring of the 2007-2008 school year in an urban school located in the northeast region of the United States. Towards the end of the previous school year, I contacted by telephone the principal of each elementary school in the school district and provided them with a description of this study. The principal of the selected school expressed great interest in the study and was granted permission by the district office to participate in the following school year.

The selected school had a very diverse population. In the 2007-2008 school year, within the school population of 748 students, 52.3% were African American, 4.8% were Asian, 12.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 4.5% were Multi-race/ Non-Hispanic, and 25.8% were Caucasian. Within the school population, 75.3% of students were from low income families. In addition, the first language was not English for 31.4% of the students and 15.5% had limited English proficiency.

There were 18 students in the focus fourth grade classroom. In this group, 7 students were African American, 5 students were Hispanic or Latino, 4 were Multi-race/ Non Hispanic, and 2 students were Caucasian. Of this group, 7 students were English Language Learners; 4 students spoke Portuguese and 3 students spoke Spanish as their first languages. In addition, 4 students had Individualized Education Plans due to learning disabilities.

A number of indicators suggested that fourth grade students at this school have struggled with reading comprehension and would benefit from a supplement to the standard language arts curriculum. On the Spring 2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)¹, fourth grade English Language Arts results indicate that only 4 students received an advanced

¹ These scores do not represent the fourth grade class examined in this research. However, the fact that the school was required to implement a Title I School Improvement Plan indicates that students have had low reading scores on the MCAS for several years.
score, 37 were proficient, 41 were considered to need improvement, and 18 received a warning score. As a result of the high number of scores in the “needs improvement” and “warning” categories for several years, the school was required to submit a Title I School Improvement Plan for the 2007-2008 school year and legislation required the school to implement a state approved reading program. Thus, beginning in the Fall of 2007, the city made the decision to implement a Scott Foresman Reading Program.

A representative from the city’s department of education and the school principal were not willing to replace the daily Scott Foresman Reading Program with Junior Great Books, due to the requirement that they must implement a state approved program. Instead, to enable this study, they decided to allow the school to use Junior Great Books as a daily supplement to the regular reading program in one classroom. The school principal selected the teacher whom she felt would be most willing and adept at balancing the two programs. She chose a fourth grade teacher and a reading specialist to participate in the study. The principal made the request to include the reading specialist in the study, not only because she felt that the specialist could support the teacher, but also because she believed that the specialist’s expertise in Shared Inquiry could benefit the school as a whole. The fourth grade teacher was a male with ten years of elementary school teaching experience. The reading specialist had eight years of experience working as a support person at the school. The both agreed to implement the program as a supplement in addition to the regular language arts curriculum during the Spring of 2008. In the end, although the reading specialist agreed to participate, she was only available to participate in two Shared Inquiry discussions due to other school responsibilities. In the next section, I describe the features of the Junior Great Books Program and how the teacher implemented the program in his classroom.
The Junior Great Books Program

Shared Inquiry is an interpretive reading and discussion practice. In Shared Inquiry discussions, students examine and discuss the works of great literary artists and thinkers, relying not only on their own interpretations, but also on the ideas and insights that come from others (Junior Great Books Foundation, 1999). The discussions typically occur at the end of the week after students have participated in a recurring set of tasks. To explain, each text is read twice, typically out-loud by the teacher, as the students follow along in their books. This enables all students, even the most struggling readers, to participate. Students have the opportunity to pose questions to clarify any confusion they may have about a story. On other days, students have practice identifying key bits of evidence and citing the text to prepare for the Shared Inquiry discussion. By the nature of their design, the tasks provide a scaffolded sequence to help students learn how to build, explicate, and weigh academic arguments. The practice supports groups of learners under the guidance of a trained “leader,” who guides the students through the reading and discussion around each text. In the focus fourth grade classroom, each week included the following activities, as suggested by the Junior Great Books program:

Session 1

- Prereading

The prereading activity engaged students in a brief discussion of a topic related to the story or invited students to preview features of the story they were about to read. Students explored their knowledge of story concepts or became familiar with a concept that was new to them. Answering prereading questions showed students that their own experience could help them gain access to a challenging work of literature.
• First Reading

In the first reading activity, the teacher read the story aloud while students made simple notes related to a specific reading comprehension strategy. Strategies included how to ask questions, making connections, visualizing, drawing inferences, determining important ideas, and synthesizing ideas during reading.

• Sharing Questions

Students asked and answered questions that reflected their curiosity, or struggles, after the first reading and they wrote down a question that particularly intrigued or confused them. The purpose of sharing questions was to help students clear up factual issues, to provide focus during the second reading, to pique their curiosity, and to foster their understanding.

Session 2

• Second Reading with Directed Notes

Directed Notes is an activity designed by the Great Books Foundation done during the second reading of each story. The teacher identified an interpretive theme or notion of importance to the text. For example, in one week, the teacher noticed that the main character changed throughout the story. During the second reading, students were asked to mark a “CH” in the text in each place where they thought the character changed. Following the reading and note taking, students gathered for a group discussion to explain how they marked the text and why they marked it that way. Directed Notes essentially prepared students for Shared Inquiry, because it gave students practice on locating evidence in a text to support a claim. Thus, Directed Notes served as a rehearsal of the strategies the students
needed during Shared Inquiry, because the teacher explicitly scaffolded the particular kinds of literary responses expected from the students.

Session 3

• Shared Inquiry Discussion

In Shared Inquiry discussion, students explored a central problem of meaning in the story. They began by writing down an answer to a focus interpretive question (explained below). Guided by the teacher’s follow-up questions, students then worked collaboratively to develop their ideas, supporting them with evidence from the story. As each discussion closed, students individually recorded a conclusion in writing. (Junior Great Books Foundation, 2006)

In the focus classroom, the three sessions were completed over the course of a week and required about 1 hour per day.

The focus of this research was on the Shared Inquiry discussions that occurred at the end of each week. During each Shared Inquiry discussion, students sat together in a circle. The teacher began the focused, whole group discussion by posing a carefully selected interpretive question (Junior Great Books Foundation, 2006). An interpretive question is one that has at least two answers which can be argued for and supported with evidence from the text. The Junior Great Books Foundation (1999) suggests that teachers avoid posing both factual questions and evaluative questions that tend to only have one correct answer. The answers to factual questions can usually be found by pointing to specific words in the text. Evaluative questions ask students to decide whether they agree with the author’s ideas or point of view in light of their own knowledge, values, or experiences in life. These questions do not require students to support their claims with evidence from the text. Unlike factual and evaluative questions, interpretive
questions have no “right” answer. Interpretive questions situate both the teacher and the students in a position-driven discussion. They raise problems of meaning that can be answered in more than one way based upon evidence from the text. These questions might consider a character’s motivation, the author’s unusual use of language, prominent details in the text, words or phrases with multiple meanings, or how the various pieces of a text interconnect and support one another.

A key rule for all Shared Inquiry discussions is that the teacher can only ask questions, not answer them. The teacher does not serve as an evaluator of the right answer, but as a moderator helping the students to listen to one another, build on one another’s ideas, and to fully explicate their opposing positions. To maintain the rigor of the discussion, the teacher can utilize a number of moves in the form of follow-up questions. Follow-up questions help students generate and develop ideas, seek evidence for ideas, and respond to classmates’ ideas. These questions are meant to extend students’ thinking and deepen the conversation. The goal is to prevent the discussion from devolving into a recitation where the students try to “get” the answer in the teacher’s head (Junior Great Books Foundation, 1999).

Training of Participants

Research suggests that teachers do not always know how to lead rigorous classroom discussions. Scharer and Peters (1996) found that teachers may articulate one set of beliefs about the classroom talk they value, but are often constrained in their ability to enact those beliefs and usually orchestrate discussions that look much different from what they intend. Similarly, in a study of elementary school teachers, Marshall (2000) found that although teachers are often aware of the importance of discussions for their students as readers, such awareness is insufficient for teachers to alter their practice over time. Both of these studies support the need
for training teachers on how to lead rigorous discussions through methods like Shared Inquiry. Therefore, in the Fall of 2007, prior to introducing Junior Great Books in the classroom, I arranged for the fourth grade teacher and the reading specialist to participate in the Core Sequence Program, a two-day professional developed program offered by the Junior Great Books Foundation. The teacher and the specialist learned about the various activities designed to prepare students for Shared Inquiry and they learned to lead Shared Inquiry discussions. It is important to point out that the Great Books Foundation understands that teachers are not “fully formed” discussion leaders following the core-sequence training session. Although the Great Books Foundation does consider teachers well prepared for the experience after the initial training, they offer additional courses and classroom support to teachers to help them fine-tune the practice. For example, a second set of courses is available to help teachers strengthen their questioning skills. In my research, I examine how the teacher learned to lead in his classroom after attending just the Core Sequence Program.

Data

Data Sources

This focus of this research was an entire ten-week Junior Great Books unit in a single fourth grade classroom. Throughout the entire ten week Junior Great Books unit, I was present for both readings of each Junior Great Books literature selection, during Sharing Questions, and during Directed Notes. In each of these sessions, I took careful field notes. In order to make sense of the detail and complexity of the Shared Inquiry discussions, I audio and videotaped all ten of the Shared Inquiry discussions.² Prior to each Shared Inquiry discussion, I audio taped the

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² As required by the Boston College Institutional Review Board, the teacher, all students, and their parents were given a detailed letter describing this research. They were given the opportunity to agree or disagree to participate in this study. All participants and their parents also signed permission slips prior to audio and video tapings.
teacher as he shared his goals for the discussion. Following each discussion, I audio taped the
teacher as he shared his thoughts on how the discussion progressed. Each week, I met with the
teacher for forty-five minutes to discuss his experience with Shared Inquiry. All of these
meetings were audio taped. I also audio and videotaped the teacher and students as they engaged
in three language arts lessons taught through the mandated reading program. Student interviews
on their experience with Shared Inquiry served as an additional source of data; I audio taped
interviews with three separate students at weeks one, five and ten. Throughout the research, I
wrote field notes to document the experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Collection Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two readings of each Junior Great Books literature selection, Sharing Questions, Directed Notes</td>
<td>Each session</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Inquiry discussions</td>
<td>Each week</td>
<td>Audio and video taped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief interview with teacher on goals BEFORE Shared Inquiry</td>
<td>Each week</td>
<td>Audio taped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief interview with teacher on goals AFTER Shared Inquiry</td>
<td>Each week</td>
<td>Audio taped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with teacher</td>
<td>Once a week for 45 minutes</td>
<td>Audio taped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Reading Street</em> Lessons (the)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Audio and video taped</td>
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As the study unfolded, the fourth grade teacher was interested in being part of all steps of the inquiry. I shared my ongoing analysis of the data with the teacher to check for internal validity and assure that the assertions matched actual classroom reality (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Showing and discussing both raw and analyzed data provided an opportunity for the teacher to have an active role and voice in the ongoing research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Once the data was collected, I completed the transcription of all of the audio and video recordings. Using HyperRESEARCH (Hesse-Biber, Kinder, & Dupuis, 1990), I assigned codes to segments in transcripts. Codes are labels used to classify and assign meaning to pieces of information. This process allows a researcher to make sense of qualitative data, such as responses to open-ended research questions (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) like, “How did the fourth grade teacher learn to facilitate Shared Inquiry in his classroom?” As informed by Lofland and Lofland, I began by generating initial codes after I first read the transcripts and identified related data. I then proceeded to do focused coding, where I reviewed the codes and eliminated less useful ones, combined smaller categories into larger ones, and if a large number
of codes were assigned the same code, I subdivided the category. Over time, I began to organize the codes into larger themes. In all subsequent written reports, I assigned pseudonyms to the teacher and students to respect privacy and anonymity. Finally, I analyzed the codes and developed arguments to frame my written case study.

Shared Inquiry discussions were analyzed to make sense of how the teacher and students learned to engage in Shared Inquiry. I used the transcripts to understand how the teacher and students learned to do the practice by looking specifically at the teacher and students’ talk moves (Michaels, et al., 2002) throughout each discussion and how these moves evolved over time. I analyzed the teacher interview data to understand how the teacher experienced Shared Inquiry and how our ongoing action research supported the experience. Student interviews were analyzed to understand the children’s experience with the practice. I also analyzed lessons from the mandated curriculum to understand how the teacher taught students to read and comprehend literature in this classroom on a daily basis. Field notes helped contextualize individual events that occurred in the classroom. Taken together, these multiple data sources allowed a way to view the perspectives of the teacher and the students as they learned to do Shared Inquiry.

### Issues of Generalizability, Validity, and Reliability in Case Study Research

The findings in a case study do not generalize to other settings. According to Stake (2000), damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or to theorize runs so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself. However, there were methods I took to improve the validity and reliability of the study. As Merriam (1985) suggests, I aimed to prolong the process of data gathering on the site. Prolonged data gathering ensures the accuracy of the findings by providing the researcher with more concrete information upon which to formulate interpretations. Second, as indicated in the
previous section, I frequently conducted member checks. By sharing my analysis with the 
teacher during data collection, I maintained an active corroboration on the interpretation of data 
with the teacher. Finally, I engaged in peer consultation; prior to composing the final draft of the 
report, I frequently consulted with my dissertation committee in order to establish validity 
through pooled judgment.

By looking carefully at how Shared Inquiry was constructed within this fourth grade 
classroom, this case study has the potential to help teachers improve students’ abilities to think, 
reason, comprehend, and understand important ideas around literature.
Chapter 4

The Mandated Reading Program: A Lesson on Academic Engagement

In the following three chapters, I offer my analysis of the action research I did with a fourth grade teacher as he learned to participate in Shared Inquiry with his students. The focus teacher, who I will call Mr. Greg, regularly used a basal reading program in his classroom. I had the opportunity to observe Mr. Greg teaching his students to read through this program. Students learn to interpret literature in a basal reading program quite differently compared to the way they do in Shared Inquiry. I discovered that the level of academic engagement in the basal reading program was quite different compared to what I observed when Mr. Greg and his students were most successful at Shared Inquiry. However, when Mr. Greg first introduced Shared Inquiry in his classroom, he approached the practice like a lesson he typically taught in the basal program. Shared Inquiry did not become most engaging until later weeks when Mr. Greg transformed how he facilitated the practice. I begin this chapter with an analysis of what it means to be academically engaged in school. In this chapter, I analyze the academic engagement in a typical

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3 A pseudonym has been given to protect the privacy of the teacher.
lesson from the basal reading program. In the next two chapters, I describe how in the context of Shared Inquiry lessons and through our action research, Mr. Greg learned to engage his students more substantively in the interpretation of literature.

**Introduction to Academic Engagement**

According to sociocultural theory, when students are taught to read, they learn a particular set of practices about a particular kinds of engagement (Bloome, 1985; Bloome, et al., 2005; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). Gee (1996) argues that what students learn are particular Discourses, or:

- ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people… Discourses are ways of being “people like us.” They are “ways of being in the world;” they are “forms of life.” (p.viii)

Gee (1989) makes the case that discourse with a lower case “d” is something different. In Gee’s terms, discourse with a lower case “d” refers to “connected stretches of language that make sense… “discourse” is part of Discourse” (p.6).

In response to how one acquires a Discourse, Gee suggests (1989), “Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse (p.7).” Thus, inherently, in a school environment, students are enculturated through interaction with teachers and peers into a variety of Discourses. For example, Michaels (1981) describes how students in a first grade classroom learn to participate in “sharing time.” In this
classroom, sharing time was an activity where students were called upon to describe an object or give a narrative account about some past event to the class. This event can be seen as a kind of “oral preparation for literacy” (p.423). The activity serves to bridge the gap between the child’s home based oral discourse and the acquisition of the socially accepted school-based discourse. For some children, their discourse style resembles the teacher’s own literate style and expectations. Other children must learn Gee’s notion of the socially valued Discourse. A student is considered to be successful if he or she is skilled at the school-based Discourses.

In this chapter, I describe the literacy practices in the fourth grade classroom where I did my research. I make the argument that when the students learned to participate in the school-based Discourse, they acquired a particular set of practices. When the students learned the practice of Shared Inquiry, the acquired a very different set of practices. At the time of this research, a district mandated language arts program was in place in the focus classroom. This chapter will begin with a description of the program and an analysis of a sample, typical lesson from the district mandated program. Following a review of what research suggests about academic engagement, I will make the argument that through this mandated curriculum, students learned a set of literacy practices that are far less academically engaging compared to those they learned in Shared Inquiry.

**Language Arts Instruction in the Focus Classroom**

The Reading/English Language Arts Program of the Gordon Public Schools is structured to meet the standards of the state English Language Arts Curriculum Framework. In the recent years, the Gordon school board has selected basal reading programs that they believe best align with the state’s curriculum objectives. At the time of this research, all kindergarten through sixth

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4 A pseudonym has been given to protect the privacy of the school district.
grade teachers were mandated to use *Reading Street* (Afflerbach et al., 2008), a Scott Foresman curriculum, for language arts instruction. The fourth grade program is divided into a series of units which are each subdivided into weeks. Each week, through a specific reading selection, the teacher is expected to instruct students on a specific comprehension skill, comprehension strategy, and vocabulary strategy. For example, in the first week of the school year, the reading selection is a chapter from the novel *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000). The comprehension skill is *sequence*, the comprehension strategy is *summarize*, and the vocabulary strategy is *word structure*. These target skills teach students what “good readers” do. For example, “Good readers summarize. As they read, they pause to sum up the important ideas or events. This helps them to remember the information (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 18).” Each unit provides similar statements on what good readers do. Thus, the assumption in *Reading Street* is that a good reader is one who is proficient in a number of skills. To instruct students on each skill, the teacher’s guide provides a variety of corresponding activities from which the teacher may choose, depending upon the needs of the students.

According to a district mandate, Mr. Greg was required to devote ninety minutes each morning to *Reading Street* instruction. As required, Mr. Greg began the school year with the first instructional unit and then proceeded in order through the curriculum. Mr. Greg described a typical lesson his class might complete during the ninety minute reading block. He said, “On a typical day, I introduce the *Reading Street* objective, read something, and then do an activity.” Occasionally, Mr. Greg found that the selections in *Reading Street* were above the reading level of many of his students. On those days, he found alternative reading materials to which he could apply the *Reading Street* objectives. However, he made certain not to stray far from *Reading Street*, because the school district tested the students every six weeks with *Scott Foresman*
Reading Street benchmark tests designed to monitor student progress in achieving state English language arts objectives.

On a few visits, I had the opportunity to observe how Mr. Greg utilized Reading Street in his classroom. In one observed lesson, students read an excerpt from the story, “My Brother Martin” (Farris, 2005), in Reading Street. Following the Scott Foresman teacher’s guide, Mr. Greg identified the following two instructional objectives for this lesson- to “identify cause-effect relationships to improve comprehension” and “to answer questions to help determine causes and effects” (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p.638). To meet these objectives, the guide suggests that Mr. Greg directs the students to “look for causes and effects” in the story and to answer “what happened and why does it happen?” (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 639). Using the suggested activities in the teacher’s guide, Mr. Greg designed a lesson with three parts. To introduce the lesson, Mr. Greg asked students to review their knowledge of Martin Luther King. In an activity he called a Word Splash, he asked students to share a word they associated with Martin Luther King. Next, students were asked to define the words cause and effect and then to read the formal definitions in the text book. Then Mr. Greg modeled how to find a cause and effect relationship in a short passage on Rosa Parks in Reading Street. In the second part of the lesson, Mr. Greg read “My Brother Martin” aloud to the class and directed the students to look for causes and effects within the text. In the third part of the lesson, as recommended in the teachers’ guidebook, each student created a graphic organizer to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between cause and effect.

As an observer, it appeared to me that most of the students were engaged in this lesson. I noticed many hands were raised throughout the session. The room was silent as the students worked intently on their graphic organizers. One could easily argue that the students were
engaged in a seemingly worthwhile academic endeavor when they examined the causes that led to various events in the life of Martin Luther King. Instructing students on the nature of cause and effect relationships within a text is certainly worthwhile. Further, understanding cause-effect relationships is essential in learning the basic ways the world works. Certainly, Martin Luther King lived an extraordinary life worthy of study. However, even though the students appeared to be engaged by a subject matter worthy of study, as Bloome (1989) and Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) suggest, there are different levels of academic engagement. In the next section, I will describe Bloome, Nystrand, and Gamoran’s levels of engagement and I will consider how different sorts of engagement are associated with different reading practices.

Levels of Academic Engagement

Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) suggest that students are rarely off task, or disengaged during the school day. Most students are engaged at least in the procedures of their school tasks. They do their work, pay attention, and most do not distract from the business of the classroom. Sometimes students ask questions, typically about expectations on page length or whether or not they must learn all the terms listed at the end of a chapter. Most students do their homework and assignments in a timely and acceptable manner. In short, Nystrand and Gamoran argue, “They go through the motions of school. Occasionally, students become genuinely engaged in academic problems and issues, but for most students, this kind of engagement is rare” (p.262). This point raises a question about what it means to be genuinely engaged in school. Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) and Bloome et al. (1989) suggest that there are at least two forms of student engagement, which they term “procedural” and “substantive.” Nystrand and Gamoran make the case that when the level of academic engagement is procedural in the language arts classroom, focus might be upon language use and mechanics or the format of a five paragraph essay, for example.
Students who are procedurally engaged might also invest themselves in activities such as filling in blanks, taking multiple choice tests, and reciting and recalling information. Nystrand and Gamoran add, “When students are not expected to pay any attention to content, then their engagement and mastery will by definition be limited to a set of procedures” (p.263).

Contributing to this notion, Bloome et al. (1989) suggest that a big part of what students learn in classrooms is “how to be a student and how to do school” (p.287). They further suggest, “Procedural display can be compared to a group of actors who have memorized their roles and who enact a play for each others’ benefit without necessarily knowing what happens in the play or what the play means (Bloome, et al., 1989, p. 272).” Bloome et al. add,

Teachers and students may enact a lesson, say what “needs” to be said to each other, move through and complete the lesson, without necessarily knowing or engaging academic content; yet, they are constructing an event called a lesson that has cultural significance. Simply put, procedural display occurs when teachers and students are displaying to each other that they are getting the lesson done, constructing a cultural event within a cultural institution—which is not at all the same thing as substantive engagement in some academic content. (Bloome, et al., 1989, p. 272)

Nystrand and Gamoran (1991, 1997) and Bloome et al. (1983, 1989a) do not elaborate on the features present in substantively engaging instruction as much as they do on procedural engagement. This is likely because it can be difficult to illustrate with precision exactly what substantive engagement entails, since engagement can be a difficult concept to measure. These researchers do suggest that substantive engagement requires more from students than the mastering of procedures. Substantive engagement requires a commitment to and involvement with academic content and issues. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) suggest that there should be
more extensive interaction around the subject matter. Substantive engagement depends not just upon teachers transmitting important knowledge and presenting good lessons, or upon students paying attention, taking in information, and doing their work. More fundamentally, “it depends on what teachers and students do together and how they work in terms of each other; neither can do it alone” (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p.264). In the next chapter, I describe how interpretive discussions like Shared Inquiry are a place where teachers and students can interact extensively around subject matter and I elaborate upon the features present in substantively engaging discussions.

In the pages that follow, I offer an analysis of the levels of engagement in Mr. Greg’s lesson on Martin Luther King from Reading Street. As I indicate at the start of the chapter, Reading Street is the language arts program Mr. Greg was mandated to use for ninety minutes each day. Although there were some instances when students were more or less substantively engaged, the engagement was procedural most of the time. Through Reading Street, most of the students became quite skilled at “doing school.”

**A Sample Language Arts Lesson in Mr. Greg’s Classroom**

As I describe earlier, Mr. Greg introduced the lesson from Reading Street on Martin Luther King with a basic recall activity. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) would label the following discourse an example of procedural *engagement* whereas Bloome and Argumedo (1983) would term the same construct a procedural *display*. Mr. Greg asked his students to recall their knowledge of Martin Luther King. Mr. Greg told the class, “I need everyone to think about what they know already about Martin Luther King. We call this a word splash. You are just
going to say any word you know about Martin Luther King. Raise your hand and I will write them on the board.” The interaction proceeded as it is written here:\(^5\)

Mr. Greg: Raise your hand and I will write your word on the board. Mark?

Mark: Famous

Joseph: Freedom

Carlos: Civil rights

Mr. Greg: Okay, civil rights. I also heard someone say “leader.” Albert?

Albert: Unfair

Mr. Greg: Unfair? Why do you say unfair?

Albert: Because when he was born, white people was making it unfair, because white people could go some place that they can’t, because they are black.

Mr. Greg: Okay, so some of the laws were unfair then. Margo?

Margo: African American

Michael: I had a dream

Pedro: Shot

Ann: Died

Pedro: Tragedy

Mr. Greg: Tragedy. He’s using a word wall word. Look at this guy. Plus ten points.

Put it in your book. Emma?

Emma: Preacher

Mr. Greg: Preacher. Sydney?

Sydney: Had four children

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\(^5\) Pseudonyms have been given to protect the privacy of all students.
Mr. Greg: Four children. Emilio?

Emilio: Nobel Peace Prize

Mr. Greg: Oh! We might not even read the story. You guys know too much already.

You guys can write a book on this. Okay, last one.

Emilio: His house burned down. (Scott Foresman Lesson, pg. 2)

Following Emilio’s contribution, Mr. Greg clearly demarcated the completion of this segment by stating, “Hands down for now. That was our word splash with Martin Luther King.”

Bloome, et al. (1989) compares a procedural display to a performance by a group of actors who have memorized their roles and enact a play without necessarily knowing the purpose or meaning of the play. When Mr. Greg asked his students to “say any word you know about Martin Luther King,” one by one, like actors fulfilling their scripted roles, each student said what needed to said then put their hand down as if their personal task was complete. At the end, both Mr. Greg and his students seemed quite pleased that they had filled the chalkboard with single words and I observed Pedro quietly adding ten points into his record of words from the word wall. Whether the students had learned anything from the experience seemed to be irrelevant. It was as though completing the “procedure” was taken as evidence that teaching and learning had occurred.

Throughout most of this lesson, the teacher and his students engaged in recitation sequences. Recitation is a tightly structured sequence characterized typically by what Mehan (1979) describes as IRE, a teacher initiation (question), a student response, and a teacher evaluation. Teachers control the dialogue by evaluating students rather than responding to their comments. The intent of the teacher’s questions is typically to assess student knowledge. Student responses are often abbreviated and tentative as the students try to figure out what the
teacher is thinking. The essential purpose of recitation is to transmit information to students and review it with them. In this context, teachers rarely follow up on student answers except when they are wrong and 20% of all questions require only yes/no answers (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) suggest that in classrooms where procedural display is commonplace, recitation is the predominant mode of discourse.

In classrooms where students are substantively engaged, recitation becomes something more like conversation. There is more give-and-take between teachers and students. Bakhtin (1981, 1986), a philosopher and literary theorist, examined how dialogue shapes both language and thought and referred to talk resembling substantively engaging conversation as dialogism. Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) in turn refer to talk in a recitation sequence as monologism. Whereas the interactions during the introduction to the lesson were monologic and procedural, in the next part of the lesson, the interaction between Mr. Greg and his students became somewhat more dialogic and substantively engaging when the class worked together to build a definition of cause and effect. Students were required to do more than recall information. It began with Mr. Greg asking students to define cause and effect-

Mr. Greg: Now, we are going to read a story about Martin Luther King. And the skill this week is going to be cause and effect. We have talked about cause and effect before. Who can tell me something about the skill, cause and effect?

Christopher?

Christopher: ‘Cause is like when you cause something to happen and effect means… I don’t know what that means. Like someone is feeling something? An effect? I’m not sure what effect means.
Mr. Greg: Let’s see. You are on the right track with cause. Let’s see if Mark can clarify that for us.

Mark: Effect means what happened and the cause is what caused it to happen.

Mr. Greg: Can someone repeat what Mark just said, because he hit the nail on the head. Joseph? (Scott Foresman Lesson, pg. 2-3)

Next, Mr. Greg asked Joseph and David to revoice (repeat or explain in the student’s own words) the definition. Michaels, O’Conner, Hall, and Resnick (2002) suggest that this is a potentially engaging talk move, because asking a student to revoice what has been said can invite the development of student reasoning.-

Joseph: Effect is like what happened, like what caused the effect.

Mr. Greg: The effect is what happened and the cause is… What did he say? David?

David: What caused it to happen? (Scott Foresman Lesson, pg. 3)

Mr. Greg then asked his students to read the definitions of the two terms in Reading Street. Lively dialogue continued in the interaction that followed. Several students offered examples of the “cause” that led them to wake up that morning-

Mr. Greg: When we have talk about cause and effect, we can talk about when you get up in the morning. So, the effect is what happens. You got up. What caused you to get up?

Andrew: My phone. The timer on my phone. It plays a song.

Mr. Greg: What caused you to get up this morning, Albert?

Albert: Actually, I forgot, because I just woke up in a silent room.

Mr. Greg: So, sometimes, you just wake up, right? Did anybody’s mother wake them up?
Margo: Yes. (Scott Foresman Lesson, pg.3)

Mr. Greg also called upon a few other students to participate. At least for the students involved, careful thought was required to define the words and then apply them to life. Overall, throughout these discussions, more was required from the students than role playing, recalling information, or mastering of a procedure.

Though engagement had been more substantive in this part of the lesson, due to the more extensive interaction around the subject matter, the final activity again engaged the students in procedure as students appeared to simply “go through the motions” to complete the task. Mr. Greg designed the next activity to assess student understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. The suggestion in Reading Street was for students to complete a graphic organizer which demonstrates their understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. With this suggestion in mind, Mr. Greg required each student to create a flip book, described in the following transcript-

Mr. Greg: So, now we are going to read a quick short story for the skill cause and effect. It’s on page 639. And it’s going to be about Rosa Parks. We’re going to read this, talk about cause and effect, and then we are going to be reading the full story called “My Brother Martin,” and you are going to be making cause and effect flip books today. And we will do that before we go to lunch. So, that will be your ticket to leave. Cause and effect flip books. So, “Rosa Parks Started Something Big.” We are on page 639. Everyone is reading along.

Mr. Greg: (Reads selection aloud. Stops and says), “I see a cause and effect relationship right there. What do you think it is?”

Albert: She was tired and the cause that she was tired was that she was working all day.
Mr. Greg: So the effect was she was tired and the cause was that she worked hard all day. This morning, I read this short story and I made an example of a flip book to show you guys one. And, Albert got it right away. The effect was that she was a tired woman and the cause was that she worked hard all day. To make a flip book, the cause goes inside and the effect goes on the cover. (Time is then spent on how to make the flip book attractive by cutting neatly and coloring any pictures.) The most important part of this is that you have three cause and effect relationships. You have to have three as your ticket to leave. You are going to find them in the story.

Albert: So, let me get this straight. We do three and then we are done?

Mr. Greg: That’s correct.

Albert: That’s not so bad!

Mr. Greg: (laughing) No, it’s not so bad. (Scott Foresman Lesson, pg. 4)

Students were essentially asked to pinpoint three places in the text and organize them on a sheet of paper. It was not a mindless task, because the students were required to carefully examine the text and locate the cause for each event. However, the students seemed to be more mindful about generating a complete list of three in order to have what Mr. Greg labeled a “ticket to leave.” When this occurs, according to Bloome et al. (1989), “Getting through the lesson is taken as equivalent to substantive engagement with academic content; all teachers and students need to do is get through. Cultural expectations that students make progress is demonstrated by completing lessons and moving through the curriculum” (p. 287). As Albert said, “So, let me get this straight. We do three and then we are done?” and Mr. Greg responded, “That’s correct.”
There is certainly a time and a place for procedural display. This level of engagement supports particular practices well suited for certain kinds of learning. As Bloome, Puro, and Theodoru (1989) suggest, “Engagement in procedural display may be a necessary condition of classroom education, and as such procedural display may be less related to the question of good instruction or bad teaching than to the question of the nature of classroom education” (p.273). For example, in Mr. Greg’s lesson on cause and effect, the word splash and the flip books were two procedural activities that allowed him to gauge student understanding at the beginning and end of the lesson. Nevertheless, a major instructional goal should be substantive engagement most of the time. For students to develop strong reasoning skills, more must be expected than just competence in school procedures. Instruction should be challenging and tasks should involve more than the completion of a recall drill or a worksheet. As suggested by Nystrand and Gamoran (1991), “It requires sustained commitment to and engagement in the content of schooling, i.e., the problems and issues of academic study. In contrast to procedural engagement, which lasts only as long as the task itself… significant academic achievement is not possible without sustained, substantive engagement which transcends procedural engagement” (p.262).

Nystrand and Gamoran (1991, 1997) and Bloome et al. (1983, 1989a) present “procedural” and “substantive” engagement as dichotomous ideas. This dichotomy implies that students are either engaged completely by an academic task or they are not at all. However, it seems more likely that “procedural” and “substantive” engagement represent end points on a continuum. In other words, there may be degrees to which students are substantively engaged. In the lesson I describe above, the word splash seemed to be an entirely procedural task. While there was also a great deal of procedure involved in the flip book activity, I believe that there...
was more substance to this activity. Unlike the word splash which required only basic recall, the flip book activity was a more substantively engaging experience, because students were required to evaluate a text and then demonstrate their understanding of the concept on a graphic organizer. This suggests that some instructional activities are potentially more engaging than others. Thus, it seems more reasonable to assume that a scale of academic engagement looks more like a continuum than dichotomy.

As a whole, in the Scott Foresman *Reading Street* (Afflerbach, et al., 2008) curriculum, students learn a set of literacy practices that are far less academically engaging compared to those that they learn in Shared Inquiry. In the next section of this chapter, I will describe how experience with Shared Inquiry can be a far more substantively engaging experience.

**Moving Towards Substantive Engagement**

As suggested at the start of the chapter, according to sociocultural theory, when people “learn” to read and write, they learn a particular set of practices about a particular kind of engagement (Bloome, 1985; Bloome, et al., 2005; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995). Therefore, in Scott Foresman’s *Reading Street* (Afflerbach, et al., 2008), students learned particular notions about a particular reading practice. To demonstrate, as stated in a boxed caption beside the story “My Brother Martin” in *Reading Street*, “Good readers can answer questions about what they read. Sometimes the answer to a question will be in one place in the text. Sometimes it will be in several places (pg.639).” When viewed through a sociocultural lens, *Reading Street*, therefore, suggests that a student has strong comprehension of a story if he or she is skilled at the practice of locating information within a text. Reading comprehension is reduced to a practice or procedure which can be mastered and students signal comprehension by their ability to participate in this practice.
Shared Inquiry has the potential to be a more substantively engaging literacy practice, because it encourages students and teachers to delve deeper and interact more extensively around subject matter. When a class engages in Shared Inquiry, there is still a procedure involved and practices that must be mastered. As described in the methodology chapter, students must learn to construct the basic argument structure established by Toulmin (1969). Toulmin’s argument pattern is as follows-

$D \quad \uparrow \quad So, \ Q, C$

Since  Unless
W R
On account of B

(Toulmin, 1969, p.104)

In this pattern, D= data, C= claim, Q= qualifier, R=rebuttal, W=warrant, and B= backing. Data are the facts or evidence used to prove the argument. The claim is the statement being argued. Warrants are the general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data. Qualifiers are statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true. Rebuttals are counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true. Backings are statements that serve to support the warrants. Taken together, all of these pieces are part of the procedure students must work through to form an evidential argument in the Shared Inquiry discussion.

Toulmin’s (1969) argument structure and the rules of discussion could be viewed as just one more set of practices Mr. Greg’s students had to master, in addition to those practices they
were required to master in *Reading Street*. However, the practices supported by Shared Inquiry require a qualitatively different sort of engagement compared to those practices supported in *Reading Street*. Shared Inquiry requires far more critical thought; the act of creating evidential arguments cannot be a mindless task. The students must carefully consider why the claim responds to the discussion question, they must carefully locate evidence to support the claim, and then they must form a logical warrant to bridge the claim and the data. They must also listen to what other students are saying as they work together to construct an argument. Unlike a procedural display (Bloome, et al., 1989), the experience cannot be scripted like a play as it was at times in the lesson on cause and effect. Rather, the practice is more of an improvisation as individual students “think on their feet” to construct a claim, to respond to a challenge to their argument, to evaluate another student’s argument, and to build evidential arguments together. Shared Inquiry has the potential to move beyond a procedural display when it includes the many attributes of substantively engaged instruction suggested here by Nystrand and Gamoran (1991)-

Features of substantively engaged instruction include authentic questions or questions that have no prespecified answers; uptake or the incorporation of previous answers into subsequent questions; and high-level teacher evaluation or teacher certification and incorporation of student responses in subsequent discussion. Each of these features is noteworthy because it involves reciprocal interaction and negotiation between students and teachers, which is said to be the hallmark of substantive engagement. (p.261)

When Mr. Greg first introduced Shared Inquiry into his classroom, he approached the practice in a procedural fashion, much like a lesson from *Reading Street*. In the next chapter, I describe how in his effort to teach students how to do Shared Inquiry, he used deliberate talk moves to encourage specific responses from his students. Although Mr. Greg was formally trained by the
Junior Great Books Foundation on how to be a Shared Inquiry discussion leader, he still had to develop his understanding of the purpose of Shared Inquiry and his role in the practice. In the next two chapters, I tell the story of how Mr. Greg learned to engage his students more substantively in the interpretation of literature.
The Junior Great Books (JGB) program was introduced into Mr. Greg’s fourth grade classroom in the Spring of 2008 over a course of ten weeks. The practice of engaging in Shared Inquiry discussions was new for both Mr. Greg and his students. After ten weeks, it was evident that Mr. Greg and his students had become quite successful at the practice. Students constructed strong evidential arguments, as Carlos did here-

Carlos: Laurie’s parents did believe him (claim). Remember when he came home late and he said that all the children had to stay at school because Charles had detention and they believed him (evidence)? They didn’t suspect him because he is good at acting (warrant). (Week 10, pg. 3)

Students collaborated to build arguments-

Emma: I think that the parents didn’t figure it out because they wanted to believe him.

Mr. Greg: Was there something in the story to support that they wanted to believe him?

Emma: They were getting suspicious in some parts of the story, but then they are like, no. It couldn’t be him. (Turns pages looking for evidence.)

Aisha: I found the part that she is looking for. On page five, it says, “Can something like this happen?” (Week 10, pg. 6)
The students also worked together to untangle the text. A student named David, an English Language Learner, received help from a classmate when he was confused:

David: Why did the father say, “When you’ve got a Charles to deal with?”

Albert: He said that because when different people acted like Charles, they called it a “Charles.”

Mr. Greg: Okay, and how do you act like a Charles?

Albert: By being bad. By acting like Charles.

David: By acting like Charles. So, that is what they father is saying. (Week 10, pg. 6)

In the final discussion I observed, although all of the students agreed that the main character of the story invented “Charles” so that his parents would not suspect that he was the true wrongdoer in his kindergarten classroom, they differed in their arguments over why Laurie’s parents did not believe him. Overall, an “object” to the discussion emerged (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991, p. 30); a “genuine concern or issue” arose from the group and “the conversation progressed to the point where the comments implied its resolution” (p. 67-68). As the final Shared Inquiry session came to an end, Mr. Greg directed the students to write how their answer changed over the course of the discussion. The students shared the following:

Carlos: There’s a lot of different answers. I don’t know what to pick!

Aleeza: Yeah, me too. There’s so many different answers. They all sound so good.

Emilio: They are all so good!

Mr. Greg: They are all so good. So, maybe you can pick one of the ones that you like the best. Why don’t we wrap it up. (Week 10, pg. 9)

The final Shared Inquiry discussion substantively engaged (Bloome, et al., 1989; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) Mr. Greg and his students. In chapter four, I introduced the concept
of substantive engagement. Here, I will elaborate upon features present in substantively engaging discussions. To review, substantively engagement is characterized by extensive interaction around the subject matter (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Substantive engagement depends not just upon teachers transmitting important knowledge and presenting good lessons, or upon students paying attention, taking in information, and doing their work. More fundamentally, “it depends on what teachers and students do together and how they work in terms of each other; neither can do it alone” (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p.264). Dillon (1994) compares classroom discussion to the more common recitation sequence and suggests that in a true discussion, there is not a predominant speaker, a typical question-answer exchange, or a predictable sequence. The overall pace is characterized by slow exchanges. The answers to key questions are not predetermined; rather students gain or use knowable about the matter in question over the course of the discussion and students have the opportunity to agree or disagree not only with their classmates, but also with the teacher.

When discussions are substantively engaging, students are actively involved in the exchange of ideas. Doubler et al. (2011) suggest what children *do* when talk is academically productive. Specifically, children really listen to one another. They work hard to explain their ideas and use evidence to back up their explanations. They connect their ideas to others either by agreeing, disagreeing, or building on the ideas. Children feel empowered to ask questions when they do not understand a concept. All children pursue the questions in depth and participate by explaining, listening, asking questions, and connecting their ideas to those of others. Finally, children actively revise their ideas as new information is revealed.

According to Haroutunian-Gordon (1991), interpretive discussions like Shared Inquiry are most successful when the students and teacher follow the rules of the “game.” A Shared
Inquiry discussion is a rule-constituted act. On defining rule-constituted act, Allen, Feezel, and Kauffeld (1967) suggest,

> It is helpful to keep in mind a distinction between rule-governed acts such as parking a car, and rule-constituted acts such as playing chess. In, the former case, the activity could be accomplished without reference to rules although some penalty (a parking ticket) might be incurred if the rules were violated; in the latter case, the activity could not be undertaken if the rules were violated- without the rules, there is no game. (p.2)

In Shared Inquiry, the rules involve “what counts” as a claim, as evidence, and as a warrant. A claim is a response to the main discussion question. It “counts” if it can be supported by evidence and backed by a warrant. When a student makes a claim, his job is not complete. At all times, students are expected to listen and try to participate in the entire discussion. Students are encouraged to work together to construct an argument, i.e., one may make a claim and another may offer evidence. The teacher also has his own set of responsibilities, which include asking certain questions and using various talk moves to facilitate the inquiry process.

Ten weeks earlier, when Mr. Greg introduced Shared Inquiry to his students for the first time, he worked so deliberately to encourage participation and establish the rules of the practice that the discourse felt forced and it lacked the feel of a true discussion. Rather than a substantively engaging experience, I found the initial Shared Inquiry discussions more similar to what Bloome et al. (1989) have labeled a *procedural display*, much like the lesson I observed in Mr. Greg’s classroom around the district mandated language arts curriculum described in chapter four. To review, Bloome et al. (1989) compare a procedural display to a performance by a group of actors who have memorized their roles. Together, they “enact a play for each others’ benefit without necessarily knowing what happens in the play or what the play means… Teachers and
In this chapter, I offer an analysis of Mr. Greg and his students’ initial experiences with Shared Inquiry. I begin with an examination of the first two weeks of Shared Inquiry because these early weeks serve as a baseline for how Mr. Greg and his students began to learn to engage in the practice. I describe how Mr. Greg’s efforts to encourage participation and establish the ground rules made the initial Shared Inquiry experience mechanical and procedural in nature. I will then describe how in the second week it seemed as though Mr. Greg either misunderstood or forgot the interpretive goals of Shared Inquiry. The next chapter describes the action research I did with Mr. Greg on his experience leading Shared Inquiry and how we worked to make the practice most substantively engaging.

A Tentative Beginning

Mr. Greg and his students entered into the first Shared Inquiry discussion on a Thursday after having listened to the story twice and participating in both the Sharing Questions and Directed Notes sessions earlier in the week (detailed in chapter three). In the first few sessions, Mr. Greg rigidly adhered to the methods he learned in his training through the JGB Foundation (also detailed in chapter three). Mr. Greg began with the first story in the fourth grade Junior Great Books anthology and he facilitated the Shared Inquiry discussion with a question directly from the JGB teacher’s guide. The first story was “Thank You, Ma’am” (1958), by Langston Hughes. This story is about a young man named Roger who tries to snatch the purse of Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones to buy a new pair of blue suede shoes. The woman grabs him and takes him home to teach him a lesson. The question Mr. Greg selected was, “Why doesn’t Roger
run away when Mrs. Jones turns him loose to wash his face?” Just as was demonstrated in the
JGB training, Mr. Greg wrote the focus question on the board and then gave the students several
minutes to write a response. I characterize much of the dialogue in the first session of Shared
Inquiry as a procedural display (Bloome, et al., 1989) because Mr. Greg performed like a
director and his students like actors following a script. Bloome et al., suggest that a
distinguishing characteristic of procedural display is when instruction is reduced to teaching
students to do school. In the first Shared Inquiry session, Greg’s efforts to teach his students to
do Shared Inquiry made the first experience more of procedural recitation of information than a
substantively engaging discussion.

To demonstrate, at the start of the discussion, Mr. Greg gave explicit instructions and his
students obediently responded to each command. The interaction felt more like a script-like
performance than a discussion-

     Mr. Greg: Okay guys… Jezell, what did you write for your answer?

     Jezell: (reading from her response paper) Roger probably did not run away because he
             was scared or he was probably scared that she would keep him. (Week I, pg. 2)

Mr. Greg then directed Jezell to support her claim with evidence from the text-

     Mr. Greg: What part of the story makes you think that he was… did you say scared of
             her?

     Jezell: In the story, he said that Roger said…. It said that Roger thought she would not
             let him go so he…

     Mr. Greg: (interrupting Jezell) Find that part… or anyone, find that part. What in the
             story made you think that Roger would be scared of Mrs. Jones Washington?

             (Week I, pg. 2)
Mr. Greg encouraged Jezell and her classmates to find evidence to support her claim. After the students searched for several minutes, Charlene raised her hand-

    Mr. Greg: Charlene, what are you thinking?
Charlene: Page 12.
Mr. Greg: Okay, everyone turn to page 12. Charlene, what part? What paragraph?
Charlene: The second paragraph.
Mr. Greg: Read it to us.
Charlene: (Reading from story) …
    “Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face,” said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose—at last. Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door—and went to the sink.
Charlene then added something like a warrant-
    Because if he looked at the door and he… because he has already discovered what Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones is like, so… so she probably because of the way he got treated when he tried to take her pocketbook, so… probably if he tries to run now, he will get the same treatment, but probably even worse. So, I think he just went to the sink so that there wouldn’t be conflict or confusion. (Week 1, pg. 3)
Although Charlene attempted to provide a warrant, she was not explicit about how her evidence supported Jezell’s claim that Roger did not run because he was too afraid. Rather, she made a new claim that the boy did not run because he did not want to cause “conflict or confusion.” It seemed as though Charlene did not quite know how to explain her ideas and respond to her
classmates. Up to this point, Mr. Greg’s efforts to establish the rules of the practice made the interactions quite orderly but lifeless, more procedural than engaging.

As the discussion continued, Mr. Greg appeared to be most interested in involving as many students as possible in the discussion. Mr. Greg and his students essentially moved through the lesson as if they were participating in a methodical performance without engaging deeply with each other or in academic content. The students continued to read mechanically from their response papers and the connection between students’ claims remained unclear-

Mr. Greg: I heard Albert react. What are you thinking?

Albert: I agree because I said (reading from his response paper) that Roger did not run away when Mrs. Jones turned him loose because he wanted to stay and learn right from wrong. (Week I, pg. 3)

Albert said he agreed with Charlene, but he also did not explain how his claim related to what Charlene said. This suggests that like Charlene, either Albert was not listening or he did not know how to explain how his claim related to Charlene’s claim. Rather than ask Albert to explain how he agreed with Charlene, Mr. Greg asked another student to respond-

Mr. Greg: Anyone want to add to what Albert said? Emilio?

Emilio: (Reading from his response paper) Probably because if he ran, the woman would probably chase after him. And maybe if he wanted to ask her for the blue shoes, maybe it would work. Maybe she will let him go out and then he went out. (Week I, pg. 3-4)

For the third time, Mr. Greg asked a student to contribute to a classmate’s claim, but like Albert, Emilio was only interested in reciting his answer from his response sheet or he did not know how to “add to what Albert said.” As the discussion proceeded, Mr. Greg tried to encourage his
students to expand upon their arguments and respond to one another, but like the classmates who spoke before, these students also did not yet know how to explain their ideas or to listen and respond to one another. Instead, when called upon, they too recited their written responses as if participating in a script-like performance. All of this contributed to the procedural nature of the first discussion.

This segment from the beginning of the discussion also reveals what Mr. Greg initially understood from his Junior Great Books training about how to be a discussion leader. For example, Mr. Greg understood that his primary role as leader was “to only ask questions,” as stated in the handbook (Junior Great Books G. B. Foundation, 2006c, p.16) and demonstrated during the training. Although Mr. Greg’s questions did not always help to develop the discussion, he did adhere to this guideline. Mr. Greg began the discussion by repeating the focus question and then continued the discussion with additional follow-up questions. Furthermore, just as Mr. Greg learned in training, he never indicated to a student that a claim was right or wrong, an essential feature in this practice. He focused upon involving as many students as possible in the discussion rather than on the actual content of the discussion. Overall, Mr. Greg and his students began Shared Inquiry in a mechanical, procedural fashion and this persisted throughout the first session. In the next chapter, I describe how subsequent interviews with Mr. Greg revealed that he approached Shared Inquiry as a technician. For instance, he indicated how he was determined to figure out the “right” questions to ask. In what follows, I offer a more detailed analysis of Mr. Greg’s initial attempt at leading Shared Inquiry to further illuminate Mr. Greg’s methodical approach to the first discussion.
Analysis of Mr. Greg’s Talk Moves

As the discussion continued, Mr. Greg used a range of *talk moves* (Michaels, et al., 2002) to encourage specific responses from his students and, in turn, teach them the rules of the game. Whereas most classroom discussion resembles a recitation (H. Mehan, 1979; Mehan, 1985), academically productive talk moves can enable a discussion to shift to talk that is more productive for supporting reasoning and deep student understanding of complex material. Productive talk moves can encourage individual students to share, expand, and clarify their thinking. The moves can also encourage students to listen carefully to one another, to dig deeper into their reasoning, and encourage students to apply their own reasoning to that of others (Doubler, et al., 2011). It is important to point out that although research has demonstrated the academic value of many of Mr. Greg’s talk moves, he did not always use them in the most academically productive way. As a result, the moves did not always substantively engage the students in the discussion in the first few weeks. Rather, as I will describe in the pages that follow, the way in which Mr. Greg used the majority of the moves at least initially contributed to the procedural nature of the early discussions.

I analyzed each of the talk moves Mr. Greg made in the first discussion and organized them under seven categories. Five categories were drawn from the literature on “Accountable Talk” (Michaels, et al., 2002), and “Productive Talk” (Doubler, et al., 2011), namely “revoicing,” “recapping,” “pressing for reasoning,” “pressing for accuracy,” and “pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others.” Research on these moves suggests that they can work to make classroom discussions academically productive; however, the way in which Mr. Greg initially used these moves reveals that this was not always the case. I also found
that Mr. Greg utilized two additional moves, namely “encouraging student participation” and a move used to “clarify the text.” Each talk move served different purposes and worked to help Mr. Greg reach particular goals as he established the rules of the practice. While it is impossible to claim that there is a direct relationship between particular talk moves and how students respond, it is possible to speculate what these moves accomplished. In what follows, I will begin by describing how Mr. Greg used many of the talk moves rather mechanically in the first week; I will show how the moves Mr. Greg used most frequently greatly contributed to the procedural nature of the discussion. I will then describe a few talk moves that Mr. Greg used less frequently; though only used occasionally, these moves were more academically productive because they worked to make some points in the discussion substantively engaging (refer to Figure 1 for the overall proportions of various moves during the first discussion).

Encouraging student participation.

The move contributing most to the procedural nature of the first discussion was the method Mr. Greg used to “encourage student participation.” Prior to the discussion, Mr. Greg established the rule that students must raise their hands and wait for him to call them by name if they wished to share a response to the question or respond to a classmate, just as they learned to do in Reading Street (Afflerbach, et al., 2008), the district mandated language arts curriculum. Most frequently, Mr. Greg called upon students who had not yet contributed, as he did here-

Mr. Greg: Why did he not run away? Reggie, your hand is raised and we haven’t heard from you.

Reggie: Roger didn’t run away because the lady might call 911.

Mr. Greg: Meniza, what did you want to say? (Week I, pg. 6)
This procedural move placed Mr. Greg in firm control of the discussion. In a few pages, I describe how on a few occasions, Mr. Greg pressed students to “apply their own reasoning to that of others.” This move was more academically productive because not only did it encourage student participation, but it also encouraged students to collaborate in the discussion. However, at least in the first discussion, Mr. Greg seemed less focused on encouraging collaboration and more focused upon controlling whose turn it was to speak.

In Shared Inquiry, the teacher is supposed to be in control of the discussion, but with limitations. The responsibility of the teacher is to frame the discussion with an interpretive question and to pose follow up questions to deepen student thinking, yet he should never steer the students towards a particular interpretation (Junior Great Books G. B. Foundation, 2006b). Interestingly, research on Shared Inquiry does suggest that although teachers ask most of the questions, the teacher and students seem to share the floor in terms of their respective contributions to the discussion (Soter, et al., 2008).

In the initial discussion, as result of Mr. Greg’s frequent efforts to encourage student participation, there was certainly a great deal of talk, but there were few instances when the students interacted extensively around a claim. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) suggest that students are most likely to be substantively engaged when the treatment of subject matter allows for extensive interaction, not just occasional participation. Mr. Greg’s focus on involving as many students as possible in the discussion, rather than on the actual content of the discussion, led to a disproportionate use of this participation move (see Figure 1) which greatly contributed to the procedural nature of the first discussion. In later weeks, Mr. Greg moved beyond simply pushing for participation towards a more pronounced effort to encourage students to interpret the text.
Pressing for reasoning.

A second talk move which also greatly contributed to the procedural nature of the first discussion was the way Mr. Greg pressed students for the reasoning behind their claims. This talk move has the potential to encourage academically productive talk because it establishes the expectation that all students are accountable for demonstrating their knowledge or reasoning on a subject (Doubler, et al., 2011; Michaels, et al., 2002). However, Mr. Greg initially pressed for reasoning in a mechanical, procedural fashion. Throughout the entire discussion, each time a student made a claim, Mr. Greg mechanically asked, “Where does it say that?” or “How do you know that?” and the students obediently turned to the text in search of evidence. To demonstrate, students offered several claims for why Roger did not run when Mrs. Jones turned him loose to wash his face, yet most of students did not support their claims with reasoning in the form of evidence or a warrant. Mr. Greg then explicitly asked students for evidence from the text to support their claims. For example, when a student named Reggie claimed that Roger did not run away because he feared that the woman would call the police, Mr. Greg pressed Reggie for reasoning-

Mr. Greg: What from the story tells you that she was going to call the police? Was there anything? (Week I, pg. 6)

When Reggie shrugged with uncertainty, Mr. Greg “pressed” another student to provide the missing evidence-

Mr. Greg: Mark, go ahead. What from the story tells you that she was going to call the police?

Mark: She wouldn’t take him to jail because on page 12 it says,

“You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.
“Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere.”

Mr. Greg: You don’t think that she would call the police.

Mark: She wouldn’t call unless she washed his face. (Week I, pg. 7)

Although Mark disagreed with Reggie, he successfully provided the evidence Mr. Greg requested to support his claim. Mr. Greg then called upon Albert who made a new claim and once again, Mr. Greg pressed for reasoning-

Albert: I think I know why he wanted to run away before. He was afraid of the woman.

Mr. Greg: What from the story tells you that? (Week I, pg. 8)

Mr. Greg’s prescribed response after each student’s claim made “pressing for reasoning” a mechanical move. It was certainly academically productive for Mr. Greg to establish the expectation that students support claims with evidence from the text, because this rule is essential for argument formation in the practice of Shared Inquiry. However, since this move was the most frequent directive (see Figure 1) Mr. Greg made in the first discussion, it inhibited the flow of the “conversation” and greatly contributed to the procedural nature of the entire discussion.

The first two moves I have described, “encouraging student participation” and “pressing for reasoning” were the two most frequent talk moves Mr. Greg made in the first discussion (see Figure 1). As my discussion of talk moves continues, I describe some moves Mr. Greg used with less frequency in the first discussion. Though used less frequently, Mr. Greg used them in more academically productive ways which better substantively engaged the students in discussion.

Pressing for accuracy.

The purpose of the “pressing for accuracy” move was similar to the “pressing for reasoning move” in that Mr. Greg used both moves to help students develop their claims.
However, while Mr. Greg pressed for reasoning quite mechanically in order to encourage specific responses from his students, he used the “pressing for accuracy” move more responsively to address problems in the discussion. To be specific, Mr. Greg pressed for accuracy when students made invalid claims. To demonstrate, in the first discussion, Mr. Greg “pressed for accuracy” when Emilio claimed that Roger did not run because he wanted to ask Mrs. Jones for a pair of blue suede shoes. Since this event did not occur in the story, Mr. Greg asked-

Mr. Greg: Where does it say that he asked her for the blue suede shoes? Let’s find that…

You found it Charlene? Tell us what page.

Charlene: Page 12. It says… (reading)

“I believe you’re hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook.”

“I want a pair of blue suede shoes,” said the boy.

“Well, you didn’t have to snatch my pocketbook to get some suede shoes,” said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. “You could have asked me.”

Mr. Greg: So, what do you think about that, Charlene?

Charisma: But, he didn’t ask her. It’s that the woman was asking him what he wanted to do with her pocketbook. (Week I, pg.4-5)

By asking his students “where does it say that,” Mr. Greg used an Accountable Talk move (Michaels, et al., 2002) that forced students to back their claims with textual evidence which, presumably, required more than just a superficial interaction with the text. Wolf et al., (2004) suggests that reading comprehension instruction is most academically rigorous when each student is held accountable for demonstrating accurate textual knowledge. In the above example, Mr. Greg’s “press for accuracy” not only reinforced to students the notion that claims must be
back by solid evidence, but it also helped to resolve confusion Emilio may have had around the story. Overall, this move was more academically productive than the previous moves not only because it supported student reasoning and deep understanding of the text, but also because it substantively engaged students in the discussion by encouraging students to listen, respond to one another, and in this case, resolve a classmate’s confusion.

**Pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others.**

When classroom discussions are academically productive, students connect their ideas to those of others either by agreeing, disagreeing, or building on their classmate’s ideas (Doubler, et al., 2011). Similarly, Wolf et. al. (2004) suggests that when teachers explicitly link different students’ ideas, this move can make a discussion academically rigorous. In the first discussion, Mr. Greg encouraged students to connect or link their ideas by “pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others.”

There were several instances when Mr. Greg used this move unproductively. For example, in the beginning of the discussion, Mr. Greg asked students if they wished to “add on” to a classmate’s claim, but students were only interested in reading from their response sheets. However, towards the end of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg’s use of this move successfully worked to substantively engage the students in the discussion. This was evident when several students elaborated upon a classmate’s claim even after Mr. Greg tried to bring Shared Inquiry to a close. Four times during the first discussion, Albert claimed that Mrs. Jones was trying to teach Roger a lesson. The first three times Albert made this claim, he did not quite know how to develop his argument. Mr. Greg encouraged students to “apply their own reasoning to that of others” by encouraging the students to add on to the claim Albert struggled to build. Finally, the fourth time Albert repeated his claim, Aleeza collaborated with Albert to develop his argument-
Albert: I think I know why she didn’t call the police. If she took him to jail, she would not be able to teach him right from wrong.

Mr. Greg: So, how did she do that, then? How did she teach him right from wrong?

Albert: She left him alone with the purse and she wasn’t looking. And she did not know if he was going to take the purse because last time he tried to take the purse, but then he fell down.

Mr. Greg: So, how is that teaching him right from wrong?

Alfonso: To not steal people’s personal items?

Mr. Greg: Go ahead, Aleeza.

Aleeza: When they got to the house, she said that she was going to teach him right from wrong. Teach him a lesson. So, I think she did that on purpose. She left the door wide open and she left the purse right there to see if he will take it again.

Mr. Greg: So, what did he learn?

Lily: He learned that…. she didn’t take him to jail because she wanted to teach him, like Alfonso said. And, he learned that she was teaching him how to be responsible… how you need to act. (Week I, pg.11-12)

The students listened to Albert struggle to make his claim four times over the course of the discussion. Supported by Mr. Greg’s moves to encourage students to apply their own reasoning to that of others, this interaction was the first time the students appeared to be substantively engaged in a discussion. They partook in a collaborative effort to help Albert pursue his claim. As I describe in the beginning of this chapter, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) suggest that students who are substantively engaged interact extensively around the subject matter. In the above interaction, the students also do what Doubler et al. (Doubler, et al., 2011) suggest when
engaged in productive talk; for instance, they listen to one another, work hard to explain their ideas, use evidence to back their explanations, and they connect their ideas to one another. After repeating his claim four times over the course of discussion, Albert’s claim was validated.

**Revoicing and recapping.**

At different points in the discussion, Mr. Greg “revoiced” and “recapped” student’s contributions to the discussion. Revoicing and recapping allow the teacher and students to move beyond the typical I-R-E exchange (described in the literature review). In an I-R-E exchange, it is common for the teacher and student to be positioned on unequal footing with respect to one another and with respect to knowledge: the teacher knows the answer and is the authority while the student is the learner/novice (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007). The teacher’s role is to evaluate whether the idea is correct. However, O’Connor and Michaels suggest that when the teacher instead “revoices or recaps” a student’s words and says: “So, let me see if I’ve got your theory right… Are you saying…?,” the student is “positioned as a thinker or theorizer, the holder of a noteworthy idea, theory, or explanation…. Moreover, the teacher and student are positioned, momentarily, on equal footing, in co-constructing and jointly explicating an idea. Because of the use of indirect speech (‘you’re saying…’), the teacher and the student are both ‘doing the speaking.’ The student, in the fourth slot, is given the right to judge the teacher’s formulation, rather than the other way around” (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007, p. 281).

It is now understood that the revoicing and recapping moves are quite different (Doubler, et al., 2011). The recapping move essentially summarizes the major points of the discussion. The revoicing move serves a very different function-

It allows the teacher to effectively credit a student for his or her contribution while still clarifying or reframing the contribution in terms most useful for group consumption. It
may socialize students into particular intellectual and speaking practices by placing them in roles entailed by the speech activity of group discussion. It may also bring them to see themselves and each other as legitimate participants in the activity of making, analyzing, and evaluating claims, hypotheses and predictions. (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996, p.78) Mr. Greg used the recapping move once in the initial session to summarize the many contributions students made to the discussion-

Mr. Greg: Emilio says that he stayed because he wanted to ask her for the blue suede shoes. And some people said that he stayed because he was scared for what she would do to him. Saul, what do you think about those two? (Week I, pg. 5)

Mr. Greg frequently used the revoicing move (see Figure 1) in the first discussion to ask individual students if he understood their thinking. Unlike other moves Mr. Greg utilized in the first discussion, he used the revoicing move in a most academically productive fashion, because he allowed the student to follow up and either agree or disagree with his formulation (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993), as in this example-

Mark: She wouldn’t take him to jail because on page 12 it says,

“You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.

“Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere.”

Mr. Greg: So, you don’t think that she would call the police.

Mark: She wouldn’t call unless she washed his face. (Week I, pg. 7)

In the above example, the revoicing move helped Mark expand upon and clarify his thinking. In another instance, Mr. Greg was again academically productive in his use of the revoicing move when it encouraged other students to participate and expand upon a discussion point-
Emilio: Probably because if he ran, the woman would probably chase after him. And maybe if Roger wanted to ask her for the blue shoes, maybe it would work. Maybe she will let him go out and then he went out…

Mr. Greg: So, he didn’t run because he was going to ask her for the blue suede shoes? What do other people think about that? Emilio says he stayed because he wanted to get the blue suede shoes… Now, did he ask her for the blue suede shoes?

Several students: No (some) Yes (some)

(several start talking)

Mr. Greg: Where does it say that he asked her for the blue suede shoes? Let’s find that… You found it Charlene? Tell us what page. (Week I, pg.4)

Overall, as suggested above, Mr. Greg used the revoicing move in an academically productive way, because he successfully positioned the students as thinkers on equal footing with the teacher in the joint effort to co-construct and explicate an idea. The recapping move served a very different purpose; Mr. Greg used this move in an academically productive fashion to summarize points in the discussion.

**Clarifying the text.**

Mr. Greg used another move which also suggested that he valued his students’ interpretation of the text. When Mr. Greg called upon students to “clarify the text,” he recognized his students as knowledgeable and capable at untangling the text. In the following example, Mr. Greg asked Hannah to help resolve Charlene’s confusion about a detail in the story-
Charlene: At the beginning, it says, “She was a large woman with a purse that had everything in it but a hammer and nails.” When they say EVERYTHING, it sort of confuses me. Like, are there some blue suede shoes in there?

Mr. Greg: Can anyone clarify Charlene’s confusion about what that means where it says that? Everyone turn to page 9. It says (reading), “…with a large purse that had everything in it but a hammer and nails.” What does that mean, Hannah?

Hannah: It is just an expression to say that she had a lot of stuff in it.

Charlene: Okay. (Week I, pg. 5)

This move encouraged students to collaborate to untangle the text, an essential feature of Shared Inquiry. Students must learn to collaborate in order to build ideas together. The move proved to be academically productive, because Charlene claimed that she now understood the expression.

**Asking for an answer to the key question.**

Overall, the first session of Shared Inquiry lacked what Haroutunian-Gordon (1991) refers to as an “object.” When there is an object to a discussion, “a genuine concern or issue” arises from the group and “the conversation progresses to the point where the comments imply its resolution” (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991, pp. 67-68). Several times during the discussion, Mr. Greg attempted to refocus the discussion by repeating the key question. To demonstrate, in one instance, the students discussed for several minutes what author Langston Hughes meant when he described Mrs. Jones as “a large woman with a purse that had everything in it but a hammer and nails.” When the discussion veered off topic, Mr. Greg reminded students about the question-

Mr. Greg: Can we just get back real quick to the question? (Week I, pg.5-6)

Mr. Greg also redirected the students to the question if a claim did not clearly connect-
Albert: I think he wanted to be taught right from wrong.

Mr. Greg: How does that relate to the question of why he didn’t run away? Does that have anything to do with why he didn’t run away?

Albert: He wants to be a better person. (Week I, pg.7-8)

When Mr. Greg asked Albert how his claim related to the question, Albert elaborated upon his idea. Thus, in this case, this move was productive because it enabled Mr. Greg to navigate the discussion back to the key question.

In the first session of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg focused upon encouraging student participation and upon teaching his students how to form reasoned arguments. Mr. Greg’s disproportionate use of highly structured, mechanical talk moves made the session tightly structured and even rigid. Although one could argue that the first session was not academically productive since it lacked an object (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991), it was a productive opportunity for Mr. Greg to learn to lead Shared Inquiry and teach his students the rules of the practice. Overall, the students did not appear to be substantively engaged by the discussion until the end when they elaborated upon Albert’s claim; only then did the students appear to really listen to one another, connect, and build ideas. In later weeks, Mr. Greg’s talk moves seemed to have different effects as he became less formulaic in his responses. When Shared Inquiry became more like a discussion and less like a recitation sequence, the experience became more substantively engaging for all of the participants. However, before this happened, Mr. Greg had to develop a better understanding of the purpose of Shared Inquiry.

**The Purpose of Shared Inquiry was Forgotten**

In the second week, Ms. Samantha, the school Reading Specialist who attended the JGB training with Mr. Greg, also participated in the discussion. Although Ms. Samantha was present,
Mr. Greg made the majority of the talk moves. Ms. Samantha mostly interjected occasional comments. As occurred in the first week, Mr. Greg’s most frequent move was to “encourage student participation” as he continued to try to involve many students and select whose turn it was to speak. Mr. Greg continued to “press for reasoning” and to “press for accuracy,” mostly to encourage students to form sound evidential arguments. The “revoicing or recapping” move occurred with similar frequency. It appeared that Mr. Greg did not feel the need to “encourage students to relate to one another’s ideas” with as much frequency because most of the students shared very similar claims in response to the key question from the start (see frequency of talk moves in the second week on Figure 1). As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha interpreted the story differently than the students. As a result, the talk move that made the second week most distinct was Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha’s combined effort to “lead the students toward an alternative interpretation.” On the whole, it seemed as though Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha forgot that the purpose of Shared Inquiry is to collaborate with the students towards a shared interpretation of the text.

The story for the second week was “The Gold Coin” (Ada, 1991). In this story, a character named Juan makes his living as a thief. He hears Dona Josefa, the elderly town healer, declare that she is the “richest woman in the world.” Juan follows her, determined to take her money, for he believes that the money will make him happy. Over the course of his journey, Juan learns valuable lessons about the meaning of wealth and happiness. At the end, Dona Josefa offers Juan the coin, but he refuses it, believing that someone else must need it more. The discussion question Mr. Greg selected from the JGB teacher’s guide was, “Why does Dona Josefa give the gold coin to Juan?”
Throughout this discussion, students essentially claimed that Dona Josefa gave the gold coin to Juan either because he “needed” or “wanted” the coin. For example, in the beginning of the discussion, Mark made the following claim-

Mr. Greg: So, why does Dona Josefa give the gold coin to Juan? What did you write, Mark?

Mark: I think DJ gave the gold coin to Juan because she thought he needed it.

Mr. Greg: Because he said that he wanted it?

Mark: Yes. The book says that after everyone declined the gold coin, when she met Juan she said that he must be the person who needs the gold coin because he wanted it so bad. (Week II, pg. 1)

Albert and Margo then offered additional insight into why Dona Josefa gave Juan the coin-

Albert: She wanted to give it to someone who needs it like the people who are injured.

Margo: I think she was giving it to people who were sick and they probably needed help.

Mr. Greg: Well, then why did she give it to Juan? Was he sick?

Margo: No, but he was the only person who really wants it, so she said that maybe he was the person who really needs it. (Week II, pg. 2)

As the discussion progressed, Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha became convinced that the students had a rather narrow interpretation of the story. In fact, there are several issues that can be explored in “The Gold Coin” (Ada, 1991). For example, while some people relate "wealth" and being rich only to money, the concept of wealth can go far past finances. Friends, relationships, intellectual accomplishments, and societal contributions can all contribute to a "rich life". Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha tried very hard to encourage the students to understand that there are
alternative forms of wealth. This effort began when one student suggested that perhaps Dona Josefa had more than one coin-

Aleeza: When Juan traveled and everyone told him that she gave him a gold coin, he thought why is she giving them away? How many does she have? She must have a lot of coins.

Ms. Samantha: Can someone clarify what she is saying?

Albert: I think she does have lots because if she only has one coin, how can she give it to everyone?

Peter: I think she only has one to give to a person. She kept giving the same one to each person and each person says no. Then Juan came and got the last coin and then she did not have anymore. So I think she had only one coin. (Week II, pg.4)

Mr. Greg then asked a question that became central to the remainder of the discussion-

Mr. Greg: If Peter is right, then why did she think she is the richest person in the world?

Peter: Because maybe the gold coin is really worth a lot of fortune. Maybe it is very valuable. I think she found it and it cost a lot of money. It might be old or it might be new. (Week II, pg. 5)

Mr. Greg then read a paragraph from the text to try to clarify why the story says that Dona Josefa is the richest person in the world. This was his first attempt at trying to push the students towards an alternative interpretation of wealth. He asked-

Mr. Greg: Are you sure that when she says that she is the richest person in the world, it is because the coin? (Week II, pg. 6)

In the discussion the followed, students provided their interpretation of what it means to be the richest person in the world-
Karen: I think she thinks that she is the richest person in the world because in her country, I don’t think the people are rich and that’s why all the people that she was going to give it to tell her to keep it. Because people think that it is a lot of money and she should keep it.

Mr. Greg: They think that she should keep it? What makes you think that the people in that country don’t have a lot of money. What makes you say that?

Kelsey: Because of the huts.

Mr. Greg: Because of where they live? Okay. I want to make sure from that paragraph when she says that she is the richest person in the world, let’s go into that a little bit more. Emma?

Emma: Because when you are little and you get 5 bucks, you think you are the richest person in the world.

Mr. Greg: Okay, so it’s all what you know. Maybe she doesn’t have a lot of money, so that one coin is a lot of money to her. (Week II, pg. 6)

Students continued to discuss the monetary value of the single coin for several minutes. Then, Mr. Greg interjected with the a question and his assertion regarding wealth-

Mr. Greg: I’m not sure she thinks she is the richest person in the world because of the coin. Does it say she is rich because of the coin? Other than money worth, he could be rich in another way, in terms of happiness and being a good person (Week II, pg. 8)

In the discussion that followed, it was not clear if the students understood Mr. Greg’s assertion that there are alternative forms of wealth. Peter continued the discussion with the following-

Pedro: I found in the story that it does not say she is rich. It says that she might be rich.
Mr. Greg: Where does it say that?

Pedro: Third paragraph. “What was that shining in her hand? Juan could not believe his eyes. It was a gold coin. Then he heard the woman say to herself, ‘I must be the richest person in the world.’” So, it might be that she said in her mind that she might be the richest woman in the world, but I think that it might be someone else’s coin and that is why she tried to give it away. She tried to give it away, but nobody took it. When Juan came, she might have thought it was his. (Week II, pg. 9)

Another student suggested the following-

Ann: She says that she is the richest person in the world, probably because nobody wanted the coin.

In Ms. Samantha and Mr. Greg’s effort to push the students to understand alternative notions of wealth, the teachers then asked the following-

Ms. Samantha: Can I ask one more question? If she gave the coin away, would she still be the richest person?

Many students: NO.

Mr. Greg: Yes, that is my question. I am not sure she is saying she is rich because of the coin.

Ms. Samantha: Margo, what do you think? If she gave the coin away, would she still be the richest person?

Margo: No. Not if she doesn’t have the coin.

Ms. Samantha: What do you think, Mark?
Mark: Well, it doesn’t really say if she has any other coins. So, even if she does give it away, she still might be the richest person. And she only said that she must be the richest.” It doesn’t actually say that she is the richest. (Week II, pg. 11)

As the second session of Shared Inquiry drew to a close, the students still did not grasp Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha’s interpretation of the story.

**Conclusion**

In the first week, Mr. Greg and his students partook in a script-like performance of Shared Inquiry with limited substantive engagement, much like the lesson I observed from the district mandated language arts curriculum. Mr. Greg used a range of talk moves which have the potential to be academically productive. However, his two most frequent moves, “encouraging student participation” and “pressing for reasoning,” were quite prescriptive and made the first discussion feel tightly structured and even rigid. As a result of these talk moves, students were eager to share their written responses to the question, they spoke when called upon, and they did their best to locate evidence in the text when asked. Mr. Greg did use some moves in a more academically productive fashion. For example, his “revoicing” move demonstrated that he listened carefully to his students and valued their contributions to the discussion. In the end, when Mr. Greg pressed students to “apply their own reasoning to that of others,” this move helped a student, with the aid of his classmates, expand upon a claim he struggled to make throughout the entire discussion. Although several of Mr. Greg’s talk moves were academically productive, there was limited substantive engagement in the first discussion. This first session demonstrates that the mere use of talk moves is insufficient. To be productive, talk moves must be used thoughtfully and in response to particular needs in the discussion. Most importantly, the
moves must encourage extensive interaction around the subject matter (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

In later weeks, Mr. Greg’s talk moves seemed to have different effects as he became less formulaic in his responses. As a result, the discussion became more substantively engaging. First, however, Mr. Greg had to better understand the purpose of Shared Inquiry. In the second week, I was concerned that Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha did not understand that the overall purpose of Shared Inquiry is for teachers and students to work towards a shared interpretation of the text. From these tentative beginnings, through action research in the weeks that followed, Mr. Greg realized the overall goals of interpretation. Mr. Greg also transformed how he orchestrated the practice. All of this worked to make Shared Inquiry most substantively engaging. In the next chapter, I describe our action research. I also demonstrate what Shared Inquiry sounds like when it is a substantively engaging experience.
Figure 1

Frequency of Talk moves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talk moves</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Encouraging student participation</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Leading the students toward an alternative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpretation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Revoicing*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recapping*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pressing students to apply their own reasoning</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>to that of others*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pressing for reasoning *</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Pressing for accuracy*</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Clarifying the text</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Explicitly teaching students the practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Asking for an answer to the key question</td>
<td>5</td>
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* Talk moves borrowed from the literature on Accountable Talk (Michaels et al., 2002) and Productive Talk (Doubler, et al., 2011).
Chapter 6

Becoming Successful with Shared Inquiry

Towards Substantive Engagement

The overall purpose of Shared Inquiry is for the teacher and students to collaborate towards a shared interpretation of the text. The teacher’s purpose is to facilitate the discussion by listening carefully and posing academically productive questions that encourage students’ collaboration. Shared Inquiry is not meant to operate according to a specific procedure. However, just as Mr. Greg followed a predetermined lesson plan in the district mandated language arts curriculum, it seemed he was determined to figure out the “right” procedure for leading Shared Inquiry. For example, in the first few weeks, Mr. Greg repeatedly asked me to help him pose the “right” questions. I describe in this chapter how Shared Inquiry did not become truly substantively engaging until Mr. Greg learned how to facilitate Shared Inquiry in a more academically productive way.

Throughout the experience, Mr. Greg and I engaged in action research on how to learn to do Shared Inquiry. I will describe in this chapter how our action research gradually enabled Mr. Greg to learn how to engage his students more substantively in the interpretation of literature. I
characterize our research as a reflective process of progressive problem solving. Each week, we met to reflect upon Mr. Greg’s experience and address problems he faced as he learned to be a Shared Inquiry leader. Our action research improved Shared Inquiry and in turn made the practice most substantively engaging.

In the previous two chapters, I described the features that are present in a substantively engaging discussion. To review, the interactions are dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) rather than monologic (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). In substantively engaging discussions, teachers and students interact extensively around the subject matter (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). There is not a predominant speaker, a typical question-answer exchange, or a predictable sequence. In a substantively engaging discussion, the overall pace is characterized by slow exchanges. Answers to key questions are not predetermined; rather students gain or use knowable about the matter in question over the course of the discussion and students have the opportunity to agree or disagree not only with their classmates, but also with the teacher (Dillon, 1994).

Substantively engaging discussions are academically productive. In academically productive discussions, students demonstrate specific behaviors (Doubler, et al., 2011). They are actively involved in the exchange of ideas. They really listen to one another, they work hard to explain their ideas and use evidence to back up their explanations, and they connect their ideas to others either by agreeing, disagreeing, or building on the ideas. Students also feel empowered to ask questions when they do not understand a concept. All of the students pursue the questions in depth and participate by explaining, listening, asking questions, and connecting their ideas to those of others. Students also actively revise their ideas as new information is revealed.

In the next several pages, I offer instantiations of substantive engagement from several Shared Inquiry discussions in Mr. Greg’s classroom. I will explain what makes these examples
instances of substantive engagement. Then I will describe how Mr. Greg had to transform how he facilitated Shared Inquiry in order for the practice to be most academically productive.

**Substantive Engagement in Shared Inquiry**

To begin, substantive engagement cannot be measured in a single student’s claim. In the first few weeks of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg used specific talk moves to teach students how to build an evidential argument. (A complete argument includes a claim, evidence, and a warrant. The claim is the statement that is argued. Evidence from the text is used to prove the argument. Warrants are general, hypothetical and often implicit logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data (Toulmin, 1969).) A simple argument count reveals that the students learned to do this practice-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Number of complete arguments in Shared Inquiry</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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For a typical example, in the ninth week of Shared Inquiry, Reggie shared the following complete argument in a discussion around the story *All Summer in a Day* (Bradbury, 1954) -

Mr. Greg: Why do the children lock Margot in the closet?

Reggie: They locked her in the closet, because she keeps talking about the sun (claim).

Remember when on one of the pages she says it is a fire in the stove burning?
Then on page 119, she whispered, “But this is the day, the scientists predict, they say, they know, the sun.” And the kids said, “All a joke!” (evidence). They think she is lying (warrant).

Although the above transcript shows that Reggie understood how to build the type of argument valued in Shared Inquiry, this is not sufficient evidence suggesting that Reggie was substantively engaged. To find evidence of substantive engagement, it is necessary to examine the interactions that occurred around the claim. In the discussion that followed, several students collaborated in a sophisticated discussion around Reggie’s argument-

Mr. Greg: What do you think about what Reggie said, Aleeza?

Aleeza shared her reaction to Reggie’s claim and her own argument-

Aleeza: I kind of agree with him and I kind of don’t. I think they locked her up not because she was lying but because they don’t like her (claim), because she came from earth and they have always lived on Venus (evidence).

Although a warrant is often implicit (Toulmin, 1969), Bella then collaborated with Aleeza by offering a warrant for her argument-

Mr. Greg: Bella?

Bella: I agree with what Aleeza said. She came from earth and she sees the sun often. And then when the sun came on Venus, they locked her in the closet, because they didn’t want her to see the sun, because she already saw the sun on earth so often. And they only get to see it once every seven years (warrant).

Mr. Greg: So, then why did they lock her in there?

Aleeza: Because they didn’t like her.

Bella: Exactly. And they did not want her to get to see the sun again. (Week IX, pg. 8)
In the above interaction, the students performed what Doubler et al. (2011) suggest that children do when talk is academically productive. Specifically, the children demonstrate that they really listened to one another. Aleeza revealed that she listened to Reggie, because she was able to repeat his claim. Reggie, Aleeza, and Bella were able to explain their ideas and use evidence to back up their explanations. They connected their ideas to their classmates either by agreeing, disagreeing, or building on the ideas. Overall, the students pursued the discussion question in depth and participated by explaining, listening, asking questions, and connecting their ideas to those of others. While the first session of Shared Inquiry was a procedural display, because students were mostly interested in simply reading aloud their responses on their answer sheets, the example above shows how the students learned to collaborate towards a more sophisticated interpretation of the text. This made Shared Inquiry a substantively engaging experience.

There was evidence of higher levels of engagement as early as the third week when students began to announce whether they agreed or disagreed with one another. The following example shows how the students were beginning to listen to one another and work collectively to interpret the text. In the exchange that follows, students shared if and why they agreed or disagreed with one another when they discussed the story *Tuesday of the Other June* (Mazer, 1984)-

Aleeza: I disagree with Kyle. I agree with Albert and Emma because they said that she (the mother) is busy. I think that June thinks she is busy. I remember when June was saying that when she is sleeping, it sounds like robbers in the house and she said that she did not want to yell because she did not want to wake up her mom since her mom is too busy. So that gave me a hint that she thinks her mom is too busy and she doesn’t want to disturb her.
Mr. Greg: So who agrees or disagrees with that? Peter, what do you want to say?

Peter: I want to say that I agree with Aleeza because I think she did not want to bother her mom. I also want to say that I disagree with what Charlene said. Charlene said that she could handle it herself. But, when she first met her at the pool she wanted to be friends with her. But, the new June didn’t want to and… Well, at first when she met June and she was doing all of those bad things, she just kept quiet. After, when she moved, she thought wrong about her new house about how she was going to have a new life and have fun, but then she saw the other June and she jumped right back to the ways he was. June was being mean to her.

Mr. Greg: Okay, Margo?

Margo: I agree with Karen.

Mr. Greg: Tell us why. (Week III, pg. 6-7)

When I observed this exchange, I saw Aleeza point to Albert and Emma to indicate her agreement. While waiting for their turns to talk, I noticed other students pointing to their classmates. This gesture allowed the students to silently communicate if they shared an interpretation. Students continued to use this gesture through the tenth week of Shared Inquiry.

In addition to Doubler’s (2011) characteristics of academically productive discussions, we can also look to Dillon’s (1994) list of qualities in real discussions for characteristics present in substantively engaging discussions. In the third week, I observed Mr. Greg’s students participate for the first time in what Dillon would consider a real discussion. In the example that follows, Emma offered her explanation for why June did not tell her mother about the other June. Emma began with a claim that was rather unclear, yet through some explanation and collective support from classmates, Emma clarified and strengthened her argument-
Emma: I think that she was following her mom’s rules, but they didn’t work out. So she handled it by herself. When she was at school she said that she would run away, but she’s in school. And when she turned the other cheek she got slapped. And when she smiled at the world, the world didn’t smile back.

Hannah: Oh!

Emma: So then she just got fed up with it and she just handled it herself.

Mr. Greg: So she decided not to listen to her mother or follow her mother’s advice.

Emma: Well, she followed it at one point but then it ended up not working for her.

Mr. Greg: When was that?

Mark: On page 30 it says, “You come to me. You just bring me your trouble, because I’m here on this earth to love you and take care of you.”

Mr. Greg: So, what does that mean to you, Mark?

Mark: That she didn’t tell her and she should have. She should have told her and she didn’t. So I agree with Emma.

Emma: Yeah and I have more evidence from the story.

Mr. Greg: Go ahead! Just tell us what page it is on so we can read it.

Emma: It’s page 41. It says, “Then my mother spoke quickly in my ear: Turn the other cheek, my Junie, smile at the world and the world’ll surely smile back.” But, I had turned the other check… (finishes paragraph).

Mr. Greg: So what does that tell you?

Emma: That she tried to do what her mother told her, but it didn’t work out.

Mr. Greg: So, she couldn’t listen to her mom’s advice? Is that why she didn’t tell her mom then… going back to the question? Because she couldn’t take her advice?
Emma: She tried to take her advice and tried to handle it herself. And then when she knew that it wouldn’t work and she got fed up with it, she just did it by herself.

She didn’t take anymore advice. She told her no more.

Charlene: I found where it says bring me your troubles. It says, “You come to me. Bring me your troubles.”

Mr. Greg: So she did say to her bring me your troubles.

Charlene: Yes, she did! (Week III, pg. 10-13).

The transcript above displayed Dillon’s (1994) features of a real discussion rather than a recitation for several reasons. There was not a typical question-answer exchange or a predictable sequence found in a typical classroom recitation. Also, there was not a single predominant speaker; rather, the participants worked together to explicate Emma’s claim. Mr. Greg’s remarks mostly consisted of brief questions, revoicing statements, or requests for students to speak. The students were the ones to speak at length. Finally, the answer to the key question was not predetermined; however, perhaps the best evidence of substantive engagement was how the students gained or used knowledge about the matter in question over the course of the discussion. To demonstrate, at the end of the discussion, students shared how they changed their responses to the discussion question-

Margo: I want to change my answer to what Karen and Saul said.

Mr. Greg: And that was that the mother would tell the teacher.

Charlene: And I also want to change my answer to what Aleeza, Albert, and Emma said.

Mr. Greg: Which was?

Charlene: June did not want to get her mother worried because she was too busy. (Week III, pg. 12-13)
This excerpt illustrates how the students learned from their classmates and used this knowledge to change how they thought about the key question. The social practice of Shared Inquiry enabled the class to think about the text in ways they likely would not have done independently.

The above instances of substantive engagement were examples from the early weeks of Shared Inquiry. More frequent, prolonged instances of substantive engagement did not occur until weeks later when Mr. Greg demonstrated that he understood the purpose of Shared Inquiry, a process I detail in the remainder of this chapter.

**Understanding the Purpose**

Initially, Mr. Greg and his students struggled with the practice of Shared Inquiry. I described in the previous chapter how the first session of Shared Inquiry resembled a procedural display of knowledge. In the second week, Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha tried to encourage the students to interpret the story as they had. In the next several pages, I make the argument that the teachers did not understand the purpose of Shared Inquiry. The overall purpose of Shared Inquiry is for the teacher and students to collaborate towards a *shared* interpretation of the text. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the discussion by listening carefully and posing academically productive questions that encourage the students’ collaboration. As Mr. Greg developed a better sense of the purpose of Shared Inquiry, the students became more successful with the practice and, in turn, the discussions became more substantively engaging.

From the start of the first session of Shared Inquiry, it was apparent within minutes that Mr. Greg viewed his role of Shared Inquiry leader as a technique to be mastered. Rather than carefully listening and responding to his students, Mr. Greg focused upon figuring out how to pose the “right” question. To demonstrate, immediately after the discussion began, Mr. Greg
looked to me for support. When a student named Jezell claimed that Roger did not run because he was too afraid, Mr. Greg turned to me and asked-

Can I ask her to support where she thought he was scared? (Week 1, pg. 2)

At that moment early in the first discussion, I had a decision to make about my role as a researcher. In our meeting prior to this discussion, I reminded Mr. Greg that I was interested in observing how he and his students learned to participate in Shared Inquiry. Mr. Greg and I established that I would not participate in the discussion. Since I had greater expertise on the practice from attending several JGB training sessions where I both observed and participated in many Shared Inquiry discussions, my plan was to offer support to Mr. Greg in our weekly meetings outside of the classroom. I knew Mr. Greg needed immediate support on what question to ask, but I wanted Mr. Greg to feel confident about his own decisions, so I nodded my head to indicate that I thought asking Jezell to support her claim would be a good move. At the end of the first Shared Inquiry session, it was evident that Mr. Greg was still mostly concerned about posing the right questions. Mr. Greg shared the following-

I need support with Shared Inquiry, in terms of what questions to ask. Tell me what I am doing wrong! (Week I, pg. 14)

I knew better than to critique Mr. Greg on how he led his first discussion or suggest how he might approach Shared Inquiry differently. I assumed that either of those tactics would place us on unequal footing. I chose instead to assure Mr. Greg that I did not think he was doing anything wrong. I reminded him that he was new to Shared Inquiry and he was still learning how to lead.

The following week, Mr. Greg began our meeting with the following declaration-
Next time I lead, I am just going to ask questions and if I am wrong, if I ask the wrong questions or do the wrong things, I would rather do it that way than be worried all the time about what I am doing right and wrong. (Week II, pg. 6)

Mr. Greg explained what he meant by a “wrong” question—

I mean I am worried about asking questions that sound like I am leading them to an answer. Sometimes I am too scared to even ask a question because I don’t want it to be leading. I don’t want to be worried about that. But, I think it stunts the conversation a little bit. I am always thinking if what I am asking is leading. (Week II, pg. 6)

In Mr. Greg’s terms, a “wrong” question was a “leading question.” Mr. Greg shared his goal for the second session of Shared Inquiry—

I feel like I want to ask questions and if it is leading, then I will learn from that. I would rather just take the risk and risk leading them than be scared about not asking them. Do you know what I mean? (Week II, pg. 6)

In my effort to emphasize my hope that we could discover together how to learn this new practice, I told Mr. Greg—

Nancy: We are learning together how to lead these discussions. I think you have a good plan. Go for it. Try to not worry so much today. See how it goes.

Mr. Greg: I think it will be okay. (Week II, pg. 6)

At this point, Mr. Greg clearly assumed there is a “right or wrong” way to do this practice. He was determined to figure out the right way. Mr. Greg’s stance reflected a sense that teaching was a technical activity. The domain of educational inquiry which investigates teaching as a technical activity falls under the paradigm of process-product research (Brophy & Good, 1986; Shulman, 1986). Process-product research seeks to relate what teachers do in class, in other
words, the processes they use, with what students do, or learn, as products of lessons. Within this view, teaching resides in the generalized patterns of activity and behavior derived from what teachers and learners do in the classroom. Thus, teaching becomes a still-life of behaviors (Freeman, 1996), detached from both the world in which it is embedded, and the person who does it. In prescriptive reading programs, the teacher is seen largely as a technician whose role is to implement a program designed by someone else (Wood & O'Donnell, 1991). This view is reflected in *Reading Street* (Afflerbach, et al., 2008), which Mr. Greg used daily in his classroom. As I describe in chapter four, *Reading Street* divides language arts instruction into a set of discrete skills that Mr. Greg was expected to instill into the minds of his students through a set of highly scripted lesson plans. It seemed Mr. Greg thought that language arts instruction, including Shared Inquiry, was best accomplished according to a set procedure.

When I encouraged Mr. Greg to reflect upon his experiences as a Shared Inquiry leader, I valued Mr. Greg’s skills as a *thinker*, a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983), rather than simply a technician instilling a set of skills. We engaged in what Schon refers to as reflection-on-action, or reflection that occurs after an event; in our case, the event was the Shared Inquiry discussion and the reflection occurred in our meetings following each discussion. Asking Mr. Greg to reflect on the experience of leading Shared Inquiry encouraged him to openly share his feelings about the experience of leading and make a plan for how he would proceed in the second week. Over the course of our research, reflection continued to play a major role in Mr. Greg’s ongoing development as the discussion leader.

Mr. Greg entered the second session of Shared Inquiry planning not to “worry” about asking leading questions. However, it appeared that both Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha attempted
to lead the students towards their own interpretation when they thought that the students did not understand the story. It seemed Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha forgot that the primary purpose of Shared Inquiry is for students and teachers to interpret the text collectively. Following the session, Ms. Samantha shared the following with me-

Nancy: How do you think it went?

Ms. Samantha: I think that developmentally, they don’t get it. They didn’t understand the story. Do you think that?

Nancy: What makes you think so?

Ms. Samantha: I think that developmentally, they think that you are rich when you have money, not…

Nancy: So, you are saying that there is more to wealth than a gold coin.

Ms. Sammy: That is exactly what I am saying. It was challenging. I think it was really interesting when I asked that question (about wealth) and all of them said no.

Nancy: Remind me… what was your question?

Ms. Samantha: If she gave the coin away, would she still be rich?

Nancy: And they all said no.

Ms. Samantha: And they all said no.

Nancy: So, you think it is related to development?

Ms. Samantha: Well, I don’t know if it is development. I don’t know if that’s why they think it is…? I don’t know if other fourth graders in a place where they didn’t have to worry about money would think about it differently. I don’t know if it is background. And if you have wealth monetarily, you don’t worry about it. But, when you don’t, maybe that is why you… I don’t know. (Week II, pg. 13-14)
Although Ms. Samantha embraced the procedures of Shared Inquiry, similar to Mr. Greg’s initial experience with Shared Inquiry, she forgot the goals of the practice. It was evident that in Ms. Samantha’s view, there is a single interpretation of a story and the purpose of the discussion is to lead the students towards that interpretation. This point of view is informed by New Critical Theory (Beardsley, 1958; Ransom, 1941; Wellek & Warren, 1956; Wimsatt, 1954), an older model of literary interpretation which continues to influence how literature is taught today. As I describe in chapter two, in this model, the teacher serves as the primary explicator of the meaning of the text, the definitive arbiter of meaning, responsible for correcting “wrong” or ill-conceived responses. In this second discussion, Ms. Samantha believed she knew the true interpretation of the story and she had a theory about why the students did not understand her interpretation of the text. In her view, the students did not grasp her concept of wealth, either because they were low income or simply developmentally incapable.

A moment later, Mr. Greg shared a similar reflection, suggesting that he also forgot that in Shared Inquiry his primary role was not to serve as the arbiter of meaning, but rather to encourage the students to collaborate towards their own shared interpretation of the text-

Nancy: How do you think it went?

Mr. Greg: Uhhh… I don’t think the question lent itself to the discussion.

Nancy: What do you mean?

Mr. Greg: Even when we led them towards a different answer, they were all stuck on the idea that the worth of the coin made her rich. (Week II, pg. 14)

It was apparent that despite the teachers’ efforts, the students did not “understand” the story as the teachers thought they should. Although Mr. Greg’s goal was to not worry about posing leading questions, in fact Mr. Greg and Ms. Samantha tried quite deliberately to lead the students
to a particular interpretation (i.e., their interpretation) of the story, which entirely defeats the purpose of Shared Inquiry.

In our meeting at the start of the second week, it was evident that Mr. Greg realized the second session did not go well when he shared the following sentiment-

From the last SI session we did, it seemed like we were pulling kids a bit. They were not asking a lot of questions. I want to see if they can be a little bit more independent in the conversation this week. (Week III, pg. 2)

Although I was uncertain if Mr. Greg really understood the purpose of Shared Inquiry, the comment that they were “pulling” the kids suggested to me that Mr. Greg knew he pushed the students towards a particular interpretation in the second session.

As the weeks progressed, Mr. Greg did not again attempt to push the students towards a particular interpretation of the story. Ms. Samantha only attended one other Shared Inquiry discussion and she mostly listened rather than participated in the discussion. In the weeks that followed, Mr. Greg did remain concerned about posing the “right” questions. This technical focus continued to inhibit his ability to listen and respond to the students in a way that would encourage them to develop their thinking, which was his purpose as Shared Inquiry leader. To demonstrate, in the fifth week of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg decided to incorporate a set of cluster questions from the Junior Great Books Teacher’s Guide (Junior Great Books G. B. Foundation, 2006a) into the discussion. Cluster questions can function as follow-up questions after the key question. During Mr. Greg’s training with the JGB Foundation, the trainer encouraged the session participants to incorporate cluster questions from the Teacher’s Guide into the discussion. However, the trainer spent very little time explaining how to use cluster questions in Shared Inquiry. According to Haroutunian Gordon (2009), cluster questions should be a set of
interpretive questions that, if incorporated appropriately into the discussion, can keep the discussion moving by implying some resolution to the main discussion question. The problem was that Mr. Greg did not incorporate the cluster questions into the discussion in an academically productive way, because he did not use the questions to respond to particular needs in the discussion. To demonstrate, in the fifth session of Shared Inquiry, the key question considered why the main character changed after she lost her cat. Mr. Greg interjected a cluster question after Karen shared the following-

Karen: I think she changed because at the end she was getting lonely when she lost her cat. And then when the cat came back she wasn’t lonely anymore, because when she lost the cat she realized she will be lonely and she realized she won’t have any food any more. So, she went to go look for the cat and…

Mr. Greg: Well, Karen, let me just interrupt real quick. Before she even looks for the cat, why do you think in the story they have her begging? The beggar. She keeps begging for the basket from a beggar before she can get the ginger cat back. Why do you think that happens? She goes to all these different beggars and tries to buy their baskets back. Why do you think that happens?

Karen: Ummmmm….. The cat. I forgot. (Week V, pg. 8)

The cluster question, as it is written in the Teacher’s Guide (Junior Great Books G. B. Foundation, 2006a), reads, “Why does the story have Chin Yu Min beg for the basket from a beggar before she can get the ginger cat back” (p. 158). Up to this point, several students offered arguments in response to the key question, yet none of the students discussed how the main character changed into a beggar upon losing the cat. Mr. Greg’s used the phrase “let me just interrupt real quick” to insert a cluster question perhaps to encourage the students to think about
the story differently. The problem was that Mr. Greg was so focused upon inserting cluster questions into the discussion that he failed to pay close attention to the discussion. In the instance above, the cluster question made Karen lose her train of thought. For Mr. Greg, part of learning the practice of Shared Inquiry involved learning how to listen to students and pay attention to the overall flow of the conversation. It was evident that Mr. Greg approached the use of cluster questions as a technical activity and as a result, the cluster question limited student engagement. In the early weeks, Mr. Greg focused upon doing particular talk moves rather than the overall development of the discussion. Thus, each time Mr. Greg viewed Shared Inquiry as a technical activity, he failed to substantively engage the students in the practice.

At the end of the discussion, I asked Mr. Greg why he chose to consult the list of cluster questions for the first time. Mr. Greg explained that he remembered learning about the cluster questions in training and he assumed that they must be useful (Week V memo, pg. 2), again reflecting the teacher as technician mentality. I shared my concern about how the questions seemed to interrupt rather than engage the students in the discussion. At the start of the seventh week, I decided to share with Mr. Greg a list of Accountable Talk Moves (Michaels, et al., 2002) (see Figure 2) that I thought might work better to encourage academically productive talk and, in turn, more substantively engaging discussions. The problem was that the Talk Moves would not work if Mr. Greg used them in a technical fashion. I explained to Mr. Greg that if he listened carefully to the discussion and carefully responded to the students with these particular Talk Moves, the moves in turn could encourage students to listen to one another, explain their thinking, and connect ideas together. We reviewed the list of moves and the corresponding examples of how each move can work in a discussion. I also shared my observation that he

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6 The Accountable Talk Moves have been updated and are now conceptualized as Productive Talk Moves (Doubler, et al., 2011).
already used some of the Talk Moves on the list, such as revoicing, recapping, pressing students for reasoning, and pressing for accuracy.

In the weeks that followed, I noticed that Mr. Greg kept the list of Accountable Talk Moves on his lap. While I rarely saw him glance at the list, it was interesting to observe that in the final weeks, Mr. Greg used the Accountable Talk Moves in an academically productive fashion. This was evident when Mr. Greg listened carefully to the discussion and used the moves to respond to particular momentary needs in the discussion. As a result, Shared Inquiry became more substantively engaging for the students; they too listened more carefully to their classmates, responded to one another, and worked together towards a shared interpretation of the text. To demonstrate, in the following discussion from the eighth week around the story *Thunder, Elephant and Dorobo* (Harmon, 1967), Mr. Greg used several talk moves to develop the discussion-

Mr. Greg: Albert, I want to hear your thoughts.

Albert: I disagree with what Emilio said about Thunder being the one to blame. Dorobo and Elephant should be blamed (claim). Dorobo should be blamed because he tried to hunt Elephant and he scared him (evidence). Elephant should be blamed, because he didn’t listen to Thunder when he said that they could be friends (evidence).

Albert demonstrated here that he listened to his classmates and he understood how to express a response, two key features that are present in academically productive discussions (Doubler, et al., 2011). Mr. Greg demonstrated that he listened to Albert when he revoiced his claim and then he pressed him for additional evidence and a warrant-

Mr. Greg: So, you don’t think Thunder should be blamed at all (revoicing)?

Albert: No.
Mr. Greg:  Why (pressing for evidence)?

Albert:  Because Thunder went away back up into the sky out of the way (evidence).

Mr. Greg:  Why does that matter (pressing for a warrant)?

Albert:  He wasn’t there so he can’t be blamed (warrant).

Mr. Greg then encouraged Albert’s classmates to respond, another key feature present in academically productive discussions-

Mr. Greg:  Okay, so you think Thunder is the only one that shouldn’t have any blame (revoicing). What do other people have to say about that (pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others)? Look at all these hands up! David? (Week VIII, pg. 10-11)

The students continued to exchange ideas and develop arguments about which character was to blame for the way things turned out in the story.

In the longer transcript that follows, Mr. Greg similarly listened carefully to the discussion and used several productive talk moves which again successfully encouraged the students to interact extensively around the subject matter. In this session of Shared Inquiry, which occurred in the ninth week, the class discussed the story *All Summer in a Day* (Bradbury, 1954). The students examined why Margot’s classmates locked her in a closet-

Mr. Greg:  So, then why did they lock her in there?

Aleeza:  Because they didn’t like her (claim).

Karen:  I agree with Aleeza that they hated her (claim), because on page 119 it says, “And so, the children hated her for all these reasons of big and little consequence. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness, and her possible future (evidence).”
Mr. Greg: So, what does that tell you? What does that mean (pressing for reasoning)?

Karen: I think they hate her like it says in the book (weak warrant). They are scared of her, too, because the boy said, “Get away (new claim).”

Mr. Greg: Why would he be scared of her (pressing for reasoning)?

Karen: Because she has a pale face and she’s from earth (evidence). I think that’s why.

Mr. Greg: Emma, did you want to say something about that (pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others)?

Emma: I agree with Karen and Aleeza. They locked her in because they didn’t like her (claim). But also, they thought it was all a joke (claim). They didn’t know the sun was going to come out, because they kept on waiting and waiting and then the kids said, “Oh, it’s not going to come out.” And she said it was going to come out and it looked like a penny. So then kids get out of her away and they shove her in the closet. Let me read the part where they said it was a joke. On page 119 (evidence). It says… (read aloud short passage from story)

Mr. Greg: Beatrice, when she read that you put your hand immediately up. Do you want to respond to that (pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others)?

Beatrice: Because, the kids probably knew the sun was going to come out (claim). They told Margot that it wasn’t, because they wanted her to feel bad, because she came all the way from earth to Venus (evidence).

Mr. Greg: So, they wanted her to feel bad and that’s why the put her in there (revoicing)?

Beatrice: Yes.
Mr. Greg: Mark, did you have something to add (pressing students to apply their own reasoning to that of others)?

Mark: I think they put her in there, because she was going to earth and she was going to have plenty of sun (claim).

Mr. Greg: What makes you say that (pressing for reasoning)?

Mark: I think that the other kids knew that the sun was going to come out, so they put her in the closet so that she wouldn’t be able to feel the sun (evidence), because she was going to have sunlight when she goes back to earth (warrant). (Week IX, pg. 9-10)

This transcript from the ninth session of Shared Inquiry shows that Mr. Greg learned how to listen carefully to his students and to use talk moves in an academically productive way for a prolonged period. The manner in which he used these moves encouraged the students to listen carefully to their peers, share, expand, and clarify their thinking. The academically productive use of talk moves made the above discussion substantively engaging for the participants.

In our final interview following the tenth session of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg expressed how he found the Talk Moves to be helpful when leading Shared Inquiry-

I thought it went okay. The Talk Moves were helpful. I think sometimes when we talk, the conversation kind of runs to a stand still or an end. So, that is why today I took the Talk Moves you gave me and kind of branched out bringing them back. So, I thought they worked well. (Week X, pg. 10)

Mr. Greg indicates here that the Talk Moves helped him to facilitate the discussion when Shared Inquiry came to a “stand still.” I believe the Talk Moves provided Mr. Greg with a stylistic approach, rather than a technical tool, that encouraged him to facilitate Shared Inquiry.
differently; rather than leading Shared Inquiry as a technician, Mr. Greg led as a reflective practitioner, because he listened carefully and responded to the momentary needs of the discussion.

Overall, As Mr. Greg had more experience leading Shared Inquiry, he expressed his developing understanding of his role. For example, Mr. Greg shared the following sentiment at the end of the sixth session of Shared Inquiry-

Nancy: How do you think it went today?

Mr. Greg: I thought they did a really good job talking to each other. I think I didn’t have to guide it as much. That time when the kids were talking back and forth was good. I think that is kind of like the goal of the whole thing. To have them talking to each other.

Nancy: Yes, discussing. Really discussing.

Mr. Greg: It’s hard to get those kids to talk like that, but they are starting to do it. (Week VI, pg. 10)

In time, Mr. Greg came to recognize that the purpose of Shared Inquiry was not for him to guide the students in a particular direction or towards a particular interpretation, but rather for the students to collaborate towards a Shared Interpretation of the text. Mr. Greg later shared-

Just encouraging the talking back and forth between the students has helped them understand the text. That’s kind of the point, I would guess. (Week VII, pg. 1)

Mr. Greg understood that the goal in Shared Inquiry is not for students to share personal responses to the literature. Mr. Greg explained,

I am always encouraging them to make personal connections to the story. And now we are telling them to do something different. Now they have to make sure they support
their connections with evidence. I think about this a lot when I lead Shared Inquiry. (Week V, pg. 1)

Mr. Greg clearly understood that while he frequently asked students to share personal reactions to the literature in the district mandated Scott Foresman curriculum, the purpose of Shared Inquiry is quite different.

It was interesting to learn that Shared Inquiry served another purpose for Mr. Greg; he frequently mentioned how he was pleased that students were learning valuable skills that would prepare them for the state exam-

I don’t ask them enough to find evidence from the story and that is what they have to do in the open response on the (state exam). They have to support what they write with evidence. (Week VII, pg. 3)

It was clear that preparing students for the state exam was one of Mr. Greg’s major instructional goals, because he repeated this response in his final interview-

It seems like this program has really helped them get ready for the (state exam). They still do some… what do we call that… coming up with ideas without evidence. But, for the most part now, it seems like they are really making sure that they do support their ideas with evidence. That’s really going to help them on the test. (Final interview, pg. 4)

Mr. Greg’s sentiment suggests that, for him, Shared Inquiry serviced multiple purposes.

Overall, Shared Inquiry became more substantively engaging as Mr. Greg developed a stronger understanding of the purpose of the practice. However, we discovered through our action research that students could not truly be substantively engaged in the discussions until they had a deeper understanding of the literature. In the pages that follow, I describe how we adjusted the Junior Great Books program to help the students better understand the literature.
Understanding the Literature

Throughout the ten weeks, Mr. Greg reflected upon his experience with Shared Inquiry in his classroom. I best describe my action research with Mr. Greg as a reflective process of progressive problem solving, because we spent the most time in our weekly meetings adjusting the practice to make the discussions most academically productive. We came to recognize that Shared Inquiry could not be truly substantively engaging until the students really understood the literature. In the seventh week of Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg and I discovered that he should adjust how he read the literature to the students. Up to this point, Mr. Greg did not stop during the two readings of the story to give students time to ask questions. The JGB procedure is to give students time to ask clarifying questions during the Sharing Questions session following the initial reading. The second reading of the story and the subsequent Directed Notes session provide the students a second opportunity to examine the story and an occasion to practice citing textual evidence. In the seventh week, it was evident that none of the preceding activities clarified enough information to prepare the students for Shared Inquiry around the story *Fresh* (Pearce, 1993). During Shared Inquiry, students were not interested in discussing the key question; they were most interested in discussing whether they thought the main character was a boy or a girl and they expressed confusion about many other details in the story. That day, in our reflection session following Shared Inquiry, we discussed how to improve students’ comprehension of the story. Mr. Greg shared the following:

Mr. Greg: I don’t like that we have to read the story without stopping.

Nancy: You don’t have to.
Mr. Greg: Well, when we went to the training and she (the instructor) said that you read the whole story without stopping, I asked if you can stop and clarify and she said, “Well we don’t do that.” That threw me for a loop, because I was thinking that their interest is not going to be held. This is definitely a weakness in the program. (Week VII, pg. 2)

I asked Mr. Greg how he might stop during the reading and he shared the following-

That’s a good question. Maybe in that first read, we can stop during and ask, “Do you have a question up to this point?” I think that would make more sense than just reading the whole thing. (Week VII, pg. 3)

We discussed how stopping during the reading allows students to stop and resolve any confusion. Mr. Greg said-

I think this helps them be better readers. It helps them focus, I think. Because it seems like a lot gets lost when you read these stories. It says here that the read aloud time for The Nightingale is 25 minutes. That’s a lot to take in and then to remember. Even if they put those stickies in (questions on post-it notes), they lose a lot. They lose track of what they wrote or why they had a question there. (Week VII, pg. 3)

In a subsequent interview, Mr. Greg shared how he typically reads to his students-

When I do a reading, like James and the Giant Peach, which we are doing now as a shared reading, and I read like a full chapter without stopping, I can see the kids nodding off, not into it as much. But, then right when I start clarifying, summarizing, asking questions during the next chapter, they are all into it. You can physically see a difference in the kids. It keeps them interested and it teaches them how to read, because we are all doing that as we read. (Final Interview, pg. 2)
This was an instance during our action research where Mr. Greg felt it was necessary to adjust how the practice to better align with his typical instructional practices. Once Mr. Greg began to stop during the reading to allow his students to share reactions and questions, we both noticed that more students appeared to follow along in their books as Mr. Greg read aloud (Memo from Week IX, pg. 1). In the final sessions of Shared Inquiry, students did not need to clarify the text as they did in the seventh week. If he did not need to spend time clarifying the text, students had more time to delve into interpretation. This likely helped to make the final sessions of Shared Inquiry more engaging. Sipe (2000) in fact advocates for allowing space for “of the moment and in the moment” responses during the reading of a story, noting that saving all responses to the end may lead to “far less discussion and lower level of literary understanding for the children” (p. 272). Overall, experimenting with techniques worked to make Shared Inquiry more substantively engaging.

**Conclusion**

In the final weeks, an “object” to the discussions emerged; the discussions progressed to the point where the comments implied a resolution (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2009). In those moments when Mr. Greg and his students jointly collaborated towards an object, Shared Inquiry was most substantively engaging. However, Mr. Greg had to significantly transform his approach to teaching in order for this to happen.

Mr. Greg was trained to instruct his students to read through a highly prescriptive reading program. In these programs, the teacher serves as a dispenser of information rather than a facilitator of learning (Wood & O'Donnell, 1991). Programs like Reading Street reflect process-product oriented instruction where the teacher is viewed largely as a technician whose role is to implement a program. As a result of his experiences with *Reading Street*, Mr. Greg introduced
Shared Inquiry like a technician. He was so focused upon leading the discussions the “right”
way that he lost sight of the overall purpose of Shared Inquiry. Mr. Greg had to learn that
Shared Inquiry cannot be orchestrated like the carefully scripted lessons he followed in the
district mandated language arts program. Essentially, Mr. Greg had to learn how to serve as a
facilitator of learning rather than dispenser of information. Once Mr. Greg stopped approaching
Shared Inquiry as a technician, he learned how to listen and respond with talk moves that worked
to engage his students more substantively in the interpretation of literature.
Figure 2

Accountable Talk moves

Use these “moves” to keep the Shared Inquiry discussion flowing!

- **Keep everyone together so they can follow complex thinking**
  “What did she just say?”
  “Can you repeat what Juan said in your own words?”

- **Get students to relate to one another’s ideas**
  “Jay just said…and Susan, you’re saying…”
  “Who wants to add on to what Ana just said?”
  “Who agrees and who disagrees with what Ana just said?”
  “How does what you’re saying relate to what Juan just said?”

- **Revoicing/Recapping**
  “Can you repeat what Juan said in your own words?”
  “So what I’m hearing you say is…”

- **Marking**
  “That’s a really important point.”
  “Jenna said something really interesting. We need to think about that.”

- **Press for accuracy**
  “Where could we find more information about that?”
  “Are we sure about that? How can we know for sure?”
  “Where do you see that in the text?”

  “What evidence is there?”
  “How do you know?”

- **Pressing for reasoning**
  “What made you say that?”
  “Why do you think that?”
  “Can you explain that?”
  “Why do you disagree?”
  “Say more about that.”
  “What do you mean?”
Chapter 7
Conclusions and Implications for Teaching

This qualitative dissertation, informed by sociocultural theory (Gee, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978), is a case study on how Mr. Greg, a fourth grade teacher, and his students learned to participate in Shared Inquiry, a discussion practice where students learn how to build an evidential argument (Toulmin, 1969). Students also learn how to weigh the merits of opposing arguments and how to modify their initial opinions as evidence demands. Over the course of ten weeks, Mr. Greg implemented Shared Inquiry as part of the Junior Great Books program, offered as a supplement to Reading Street (Afflerbach, et al., 2008), the district mandated reading program.

Over the course of ten weeks, I observed Mr. Greg while using the Junior Great Books program and while providing instruction through Reading Street. Mr. Greg and his students initially struggled with Shared Inquiry. I describe in this dissertation how I engaged Mr. Greg in action research (Stringer, 2007) to examine how to make Shared Inquiry most successful. Over time, the teacher and students learned a new way of engaging, not only with literature, but also
with fellow classmates. This dissertation also describes how the fourth grade students learned a different set of literacy practices through Reading Street. In this concluding chapter, using Kitchener and King’s Reflective Judgment Model (1981), I complete my argument about why Shared Inquiry is a more substantively engaging literacy practice. In the final pages, I address several implications I have drawn from the findings in this research.

**Development of Reflective Judgment through Shared Inquiry**

In this dissertation, the argument is made that Shared Inquiry has the potential to be a far more substantively engaging (Nystrand, 2006; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, 1997) literacy practice than the mandated reading program. The Reading Street curriculum is designed to instruct students on essential reading skills, what the developers believe “good readers do.” For example, as the basal reader declares, “Good readers summarize. As they read, they pause to sum up the important ideas or events. This helps them to remember the information (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 18).” It is certainly important for students to learn essential reading skills like how to summarize the main ideas of a text. However, Friedman (2000) makes the case,

The ability to reflect through a process of inquiry, to weigh and consider evidence, to extricate biases from this evidence, and to compare personal thinking against external truths is paramount in addressing all facets of life. Reflective thinking is essential in nurturing a personal sense of knowing and in helping youngsters develop and progress cognitively into adulthood. (p. 104)

While Mr. Greg’s students learned essential reading skills through Reading Street, through Shared Inquiry they learned reflective thinking skills. The students developed what Kitchener and King refer to as reflective judgment (King, 1978; Kitchener, 1977; Kitchener & King, 1994; Kitchener & King, 1981). Kitchener and King examined how individuals’
conceptions of the nature of knowledge, the nature of reality, and their concepts of justification change over age and educational levels. They developed a Reflective Judgment Model (1981), a seven-stage model of post-adolescent reasoning styles--

### Assumptions about Knowledge Related to Levels 1 through 7 of the Reflective Judgment Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>How certain is knowledge?</th>
<th>How is knowledge gained?</th>
<th>How are beliefs justified?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Absolutely certain.</td>
<td>Via direct observation.</td>
<td>Beliefs are direct reflection of reality. No need to justify them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Absolutely certain but not immediately available.</td>
<td>Via direct observation and via what authorities say is true.</td>
<td>Direct observation or via authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Absolutely certain about some things; temporarily uncertain about others.</td>
<td>Via authorities in some areas; through our own biases when knowledge is uncertain.</td>
<td>Via authorities in some areas; via what feels right in the moment where knowledge is uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No certainty because of situational variables (data lost over time).</td>
<td>Via our own and others’ biases, data, and logic.</td>
<td>Via idiosyncratic evaluations of evidence and unevaluated beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No certainty except via personal perspectives within a specific context.</td>
<td>Via evidence and rules of inquiry appropriate for the context.</td>
<td>By rules of inquiry for a particular context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Some personal certainty about beliefs based on evaluations of evidence on different sides of the question.</td>
<td>Via personal assessment of arguments and data, via evaluated opinions of experts.</td>
<td>Via generalized rules of inquiry, personal evaluations that apply across contexts, evaluated views of experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Certainty that some knowledge claims are better and more complete than others although they are open to evaluation.</td>
<td>Via a process of critical inquiry or synthesis.</td>
<td>As more or less reasonable conjectures about reality or the world based on integration and evaluation of data, evidence, and/or opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from Walcott and Lynch (1997, p. 63), as adapted from Kitchener.

The seven stage Reflective Judgment Model outlines a sequence of increasingly complex assumptions about knowledge and reality and shows how the two are related to forms of
justification. According to Kitchener and King (1981), “Each stage represents a logically coherent network of assumptions and corresponding concepts that are used to justify beliefs” (p. 91). For example, an individual in the first stage of reflective judgment views authority figures as the source of absolute knowledge and finds it reasonable to justify personal beliefs by simple reference to an authority’s beliefs. Thus, an individual in stage one assumes, “what is true for an authority figure is true for me” (Kitchener & King, 1981, p. 92). By contrast, an individual at the seventh stage of reflective judgment considers absolute knowledge impossible to obtain. A person who possesses the highest level of reflective judgment justifies beliefs based on “an idiosyncratic evaluation of data,” meaning that the person understands that what is true for him is not necessarily true for others, knows it is “inconsistent and illogical” to consider authority figures “the source of absolute knowledge,” and thus understands that knowledge is most certainly “idiosyncratic to the individual” (Kitchener & King, 1981, p. 92). When individuals reach the highest level of reflective judgment, they understand how to reason critically; they understand how to examine different points of view, reflect on their logic, evaluate the evidence, and come to a conclusion about what seems most reasonable or likely. Overall, the process of forming reflective judgment becomes increasingly more complex, sophisticated and comprehensive from lower to higher stages (Kitchener, 1977; Kitchener & King, 1994; Kitchener & King, 1981).

Research on the reasoning skills of early adolescents and young adults suggests that most believe that each problem has a right or wrong answer and authorities have all the answers (Kitchener & King, 1994). Thus, most adolescents typically reason at levels one, two, and sometimes three. Kitchener and King (1981) found that “older, better educated subjects” (p.112) held more complex and sophisticated assumptions about the justification beliefs than did younger
subjects with less education. Although the Reflective Judgment Model is applied to adolescents and young adults in the literature, I argue here that through Shared Inquiry, many of the fourth grade students in Mr. Greg’s classroom developed more complex methods to justify their beliefs.

It must be stated that through both *Reading Street* and Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg’s students acquired notions about how knowledge is gained and beliefs are justified. In all of the instruction I observed from the *Reading Street* curriculum, the fourth grade students merely demonstrated reasoning at the first level on the Reflective Judgment Model. To demonstrate, in the lesson on Martin Luther King, knowledge was understood to be authority-based and absolute. At the start of the lesson, when students shouted single words to describe Martin Luther King, Mr. Greg positioned himself as the sole authority on which responses were correct. Students gained knowledge though interaction with Mr. Greg and the *Reading Street* textbook. Mr. Greg and his students accepted as *truth* the *Reading Street* definitions of cause and effect and the story on the life of Martin Luther King. Students used the text to pinpoint precisely what caused various events to occur in the life of Martin Luther King and the effects of these events. In the end, Mr. Greg decided whether a student’s cause and effect flip book was accurate. Throughout the lesson, Mr. Greg did not ask students to identify differences in opinion or to justify their beliefs. The goal in this lesson was for students to arrive at the right answer rather than to justify knowledge through a process of inquiry.

As Mr. Greg and his students slowly became successful at the practice of Shared Inquiry, many of them demonstrated reasoning at the third or fourth level on the Reflective Judgment Model. These students showed evidence of learning to reason through a process of critical and rigorous inquiry. For instance, they learned how to examine an interpretive question and build a complete evidential argument, as Carlos does here-
Carlos: Laurie’s parents did believe him (claim). Remember when he came home late and he said that all the children had to stay at school because Charles had detention and they believed him (evidence)? They didn’t suspect him because he is good at acting (warrant). (Week 10, pg. 3)

Students also demonstrated the understanding that some judgments are more correct than others. Take for example Peter’s statement in the discussion around the story *Tuesday of the Other June* (Mazer, 1984)-

Peter: I want to say that I agree with Aleeza because I think she did not want to bother her mom. I also want to say that I disagree with what Charlene said. Charlene said that she could handle it herself. But, when she first met her at the pool she wanted to be friends with her. But, the new June didn’t want to and… Well, at first when she met June and she was doing all of those bad things, she just kept quiet. After, when she moved, she thought wrong about her new house about how she was going to have a new life and have fun, but then she saw the other June and she jumped right back to the ways he was. June was being mean to her.

(Week III, pg. 7)

When Peter shared how he agreed with Aleeza but disagreed with Charlene, he demonstrated the understanding that some knowledge claims are better and more reasonable than others. Peter also demonstrated the understanding that knowledge statements can be evaluated as more or less likely approximations to reality and must be open to scrutiny. It may be a stretch to assume that all of Mr. Greg’s students approximated higher levels of reflective judgment. However, many students demonstrated that they could reason critically. In several Shared Inquiry discussions, students like Carlos and Pedro revealed their “ability to examine different points of view, reflect
on their logic, evaluate the evidence, and come to a conclusion about what seems most reasonable or likely” (Kitchener & King, 1981, p. 113).

Kitchener and King (1981) suggest that higher stages of reflective judgment develop out of lower stages in a sequential fashion. Thus, as Mr. Greg and his students developed their understanding of how to engage in Shared Inquiry, they concurrently developed higher levels of reflective judgment. However, it may also be that different curricula create different affordances for different levels of judgment. The notion of affordances, a term coined by Gibson (1977), refers to all “action possibilities” latent in an environment of which an individual is capable of performing. The instruction I observed from the Reading Street curriculum did not afford students the opportunity to engage in reflective thinking beyond the first stage of the Reflective Judgment Model. Although it may have been possible for the students to display higher levels of reflective judgment, the instruction did not create affordances for the students to do so, because the instruction neither required nor demanded it. On the other hand, the Junior Great Books program does create affordances for students to advance to higher stages of reflective judgment. As Mr. Greg and his students became more successful with the practice of Shared Inquiry, they began to demonstrate reasoning and reflective thinking beyond their years. Thus, this is one more reason why Shared Inquiry was a more substantively engaging literacy practice.

**Implications**

This case study, though small in scope, has several implications for practice. The conclusion of this chapter will explore these implications. To begin, this study reveals that a teacher’s role in an interpretive discussion is quite different from the role the teacher plays when following a lesson plan from a prescriptive reading program like Reading Street. In Reading Street, Mr. Greg served as a technician whose role was to instill skills into the minds of his
students. In Shared Inquiry, Mr. Greg’s role was to facilitate the discussion by listening carefully and posing academically productive questions that encourage students’ collaboration. Mr. Greg had to learn a new set of teaching practices to lead Shared Inquiry. Thus, the first implication for practice is that teachers benefit from opportunities where they can participate and learn to orchestrate interpretive discussions. Mr. Greg learned how to be a Shared Inquiry leader from the Junior Great Books Foundation. During the Junior Great Books professional development program, he had the opportunity to observe and participate in several Shared Inquiry discussions. However, initially, he found it challenging to orchestrate Shared Inquiry in his own classroom. Thus, teachers benefit from support as they learn to lead interpretive discussions.

It took time for Mr. Greg to understand his role in the discussions; he had to learn not to encourage specific responses from students or to lead them towards his personal interpretation. Through action research with me, Mr. Greg developed these understandings. We reflected upon each Shared Inquiry discussion and fine-tuned his approach to the practice in order to make the experience most successful. When I encouraged Mr. Greg to reflect upon his experiences as a Shared Inquiry leader, I valued Mr. Greg’s skills as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983). We engaged in what Schon refers to as reflection-on-action, or reflection that occurs after an event; in our case, the event was the Shared Inquiry discussion and the reflection occurred in our meetings following each discussion. Thus, a second implication for practice is that it is beneficial for teachers learning to lead interpretive discussions to reflect upon the practice, and even engage in action research, with a supportive colleague.

Findings from this study also imply that teachers who wish to engage students in interpretive discussions benefit from a collection of resources which support the practice. The
Junior Great Books program includes literature and suggested exercises to prepare students for Shared Inquiry. Prescriptive reading programs like *Reading Street* are not designed to support interpretive discussions. This study suggests that instruction within programs like *Reading Street* tends to be more skill based and procedural than substantive in nature. Thus, a final implication for practice considers how to maintain the level of substantive engagement achieved through Shared Inquiry. Most children benefit more from rich language and literacy environments than they do from exclusive skills based reading instruction (V. Purcell-Gates, et al., 1995; Sacks & Mergendoller, 1997). If the goal of reading instruction is to prepare students to manage the increasing linguistic and cognitive demands of schooling, then as Goldenberg (1992) states, “True education—real teaching [should involve] helping students to think, reason, comprehend, and understand important ideas” (p.108). According to Bloom (1964),

> Where the environment is relatively constant over long periods of time we have hypothesized that a relevant human characteristic will be far more stable than when the environment is more changeable… On the other hand, when the environment shifts markedly from one point in time to another, stability is likely to be lower. (p.199)

Haroutunian-Gordon (1991) suggests,

> It stands to reason, then, that if we wish the habits and tendencies developed by interpretive discussion to endure, the other school activities should not be antithetical to them and perhaps should require repetition. (p. 184)

Thus, students benefit from repeated opportunities to engage more substantively with literature and classmates. Students should also be provided with opportunities to think, reason, comprehend, and understand important ideas in other content areas.
As I observed Mr. Greg and his students substantively engage in Shared Inquiry, I observed how the experience transformed the class. Mr. Greg transformed how he approached the discussions; in the early weeks, he took a technical approach to leading Shared Inquiry. He focused upon leading the discussions the “right” way and this made him lose sight of the overall purpose of Shared Inquiry. As the weeks progressed, Mr. Greg realized that he could not orchestrate Shared Inquiry like the carefully scripted lessons he followed in *Reading Street*. As he learned how to listen and respond with talk moves that worked to engage his students more substantively in the interpretation of literature, he became a facilitator of learning rather than a dispenser of information. The students also transformed through the process of learning to do Shared Inquiry. Initially, when Mr. Greg posed interpretive questions, students responded by simply reading from their answer sheets. In time, they understood how to develop evidential arguments independently and through collaboration with peers. I also observed the students develop new listening habits. When I observed this class participate in *Reading Street* instruction, the students were only responsible for listening and responding to the teacher. Through Shared Inquiry, I observed Mr. Greg’s students learn to respond not only to him, but also to their classmates. This chapter describes how Shared Inquiry also proved to be a transformative experience for many students, because they developed higher levels of reflective judgment.

Prior to pursuing a doctorate in education, I was a public school teacher. Like Mr. Greg, my school district mandated teachers to use a particular set of literacy practices. I found opportunities to engage my students in literature discussions, but I did not quite know what literature I should use, which questions to ask, or how to make those discussions most engaging. When Dr. Curt Dudley-Marling, my dissertation chair, introduced me to Shared Inquiry and the
literature from the JGB program, I knew I discovered what I was missing in my classroom. I introduced this dissertation with the following quotation:

The literary text must not be reduced to exercise or drill, but must be allowed to live as a work of art, influencing the reader to see, think, and feel (Probst, 1994, p. 37).

I believe Shared Inquiry brought literature to life for the teacher and students in this fourth grade classroom.
References


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