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MATERIALS, ACTIVITIES, AND TALK: INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF FIRST GRADE READING GROUPS

by

LYNNE A. TICKE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
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Abstract

**MATERIALS, ACTIVITIES AND TALK: INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF FIRST GRADE READING GROUPS**

by

Lynne A. Ticke

Advisor: Professor Katherine Nelson

This study examines the interrelationships between academic and social dimensions of the learning environments constituting ability-based reading groups in a first-grade classroom. The research questions address how variation in particular features of reading groups, such as the materials used and the reading activities in which students and their teacher engage, relate to changes in the patterns of the discourse that is constructed and how this impacts on students' participation.

This study draws on theoretical constructs from Vygotsky and the sociohistorical school of cognitive development, sociolinguistics, and education in its underlying premises and analytical methods. A variety of methods were employed to collect data for a period of eight months. These included classroom observations, interviews,

and videotape recordings. Data analysis involved macro descriptions of the instructional contexts as well as a discourse analysis of a select sample of high and low ability group reading events. Features of the discourse that were examined include: 1) teacher turn-allocation procedures, 2) student initiations, 3) student interrupting behaviors, and 4) teacher management acts.

Findings indicate that the high group members had more opportunities to display their knowledge verbally and to engage in discussions of meaningful storybooks compared to their low group peers. The teacher used more open bid process elicitations which encouraged group participation. Consequently, high group members engaged in more initiating and interrupting behaviors across the school year. In contrast, the low group members primarily worked with reading materials that focused on isolated units of print. Their interactions with the teacher provided few opportunities for them to express their knowledge verbally. The teacher primarily used a more teacher-controlled turn allocation strategy compared to the high group events. Consequently low group members' initiating and interrupting behaviors remained relatively stable over time. When the activity was changed to storybook reading, the low group members' initiations increased dramatically.

It is concluded that the types of reading processes emphasized during high and low group instruction reflect complementary aspects of the reading process. Students need learning opportunities that foster the development of skills as well as rich communication around meaningful texts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Classroom-based studies of literacy learning carried out within a sociocultural perspective suggest that literacy development cannot be understood separate from the context in which it occurs. Researchers working within a sociocultural approach have shown that classroom contexts are complex communicative events within which speech and knowledge are inextricably linked (Bloome & Green, 1982; Cazden, 1986, 1988; Collins & Michaels, 1980; and McDermott, 1976 among others). Within this framework, particular ways of talking about print, as well as the forms and functions literacy serves, shapes learners' understanding of literacy and how they use this knowledge in their everyday activities (Heath, 1983).

The above perspective comes out of a larger sociocultural approach to cognitive development that is grounded in the belief that cognitive processes originate in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978). The role of language within this framework is given critical importance as mediating the individual and the social (Leontiev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1981, 1985). Thus, it is through communicative processes that the cognitive and the

social are united (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993).

In typical first-grade classrooms, literacy instruction occurs within a variety of learning contexts. Learning may occur formally when a teacher leads a meeting with the entire class, when she conducts a lesson in small reading groups, or when she works one-on-one with a child. Learning may also occur informally as well when students assist their teacher in following a recipe during a cooking activity, or when students assist one another in reading directions to a game.

These classroom literacy contexts are constituted by both academic and social dimensions (Erickson, 1982; Mehan, 1979). With regard to academic dimensions, there is the curricular content of the lessons. Lessons may be comprised of tasks that are meaning oriented or more skills-based. Curricular goals may be carried out through a variety of materials such children's literature, skills workbooks, and basal readers. In addition to the academic dimensions of classroom literacy instruction, instructional contexts are comprised of social dimensions. Mehan (1979), among others, has demonstrated that success in school involves learning not only the academic content of the lessons but the social rules or norms for appropriate participation as well. Such rules may include the ways turns are allocated during interaction and the conditions under which students may participate in an ongoing lesson.

Of the different instructional grouping practices teachers engage in, grouping children for reading instruction on the basis of ability is one of the more prevalent classroom practices, particularly in the early grades (Austin & Morrison, 1963; Goodlad, 1984). This grouping practice, in which students designated as having "similar" abilities are assigned to the same group for instruction, is based on the rationale that this practice enables teachers to deal effectively with the range of students' abilities by modifying instruction to the individual needs of each child. This instructional practice remains prevalent today, in spite of a substantial body of research which shows that children are offered differential instruction when they are members of ability-based reading groups (See Barr & Dreeben for a good review; Collins, 1986; Hiebert, 1983).

Studies which have examined the nature of students' participation during ability-group instruction have characterized high group members' reading performance behaviors as consisting of fewer interruptions of reading turns, a higher frequency of student initiations and more teacher-acknowledged initiations, and fewer management acts than low group reading activities (Borko & Eisenhart, 1989; Collins, 1986; Eder, 1982). Low group members' performance behaviors have been characterized by a greater number of intrusions, and more inattention and distraction (both from

inside and outside the groups) compared to their high group peers (Eder 1981, 1982; McDermott 1976).

To better understand the possible origins of these differences in ability group performance, investigators working within a variety of disciplines, including education, cognitive psychology, sociology, and anthropology, have examined various features of the instructional environment. One of the more robust findings that comes out of this literature indicates that students in ability-based reading groups receive differential instruction and in turn this results in different types of learning opportunities (Allington, 1983; Barr & Dreeben, 1991; Cazden, 1988; Collins, 1986; McDermott, 1976, among others). Allington (1983), for example, argues that "good and poor readers differ in their reading ability as much because of differences in instruction as in variations in individual learning styles or aptitudes" (p. 548).

These studies have found that ability group instruction differs with regard to the type of materials used, the reading activities in which group members engage, the curricular content emphasized, and the ways teachers structure learning opportunities within these groups. For example, investigators have found that good readers more frequently engage in meaning-oriented activities such as story discussions and are asked more questions that require comprehension of text and their opinions. Compared to high-

ability groups, instruction during low-ability groups tends to emphasize more drill and practice activities that focus on the acquisition of reading skills such as decoding and sound-letter correspondences rather than on meaning. Additionally low group instruction tends to focus on small and isolated units of print, such as individual words or short sentences, that are decontextualized from meaningful tasks (Allington, 1980b; Collins, 1986; DeStefano, Pepinsky, & Sanders, 1982). Research has also found that low-group members typically read less material which is presented at a slower pace than their high group peers (Barr, 1974, 1975; Barr & Dreeben, 1983).

Other investigators have focused more on the social and linguistic aspects of instructional contexts for how these impact on student participation and learning (Au, 1980; Au & Mason, 1981; Bloome, 1987; Borko & Eisenhart, 1989; Cazden, 1972, 1982, 1988; Collins, 1986, 1987; DeStefano, Pepinsky, & Sanders, 1982; Eder, 1982; Green, Weade & Graham, 1988; McDermott, 1976). This work is grounded in a theoretical approach that views classroom activities as communicative contexts where classroom participants make interactive demands as well as academic demands on each other as they work together to construct classroom events. This body of research suggests that styles of participation and ways of interacting with and communicating about print may vary across group levels (Eder, 1982).

Although these studies have characterized patterns of student participation in ability group reading events, the majority of these studies have examined reading groups engaged in activities that are comprised of a round-robin system of turn taking whereby each student takes a turn reading aloud from the text. The text has typically been a basal reader. In addition, the organization of the instructional talk has been described as the classroom recitation script, characterized by a three-part interactional sequence of teacher initiation, student response and teacher evaluation (IRE) (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Traditionally, classroom talk reflects a view of teaching as transmission and takes the form of a teacher-dominated lesson. Students are expected to receive information from the teacher and their participation is restricted to supplying answers in pre-allocated slots (Cazden, 1986, 1988; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1983).

Recently, investigators have examined another type of classroom communicative event often termed instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1993; Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This type of communicative event has not been adequately addressed in the literature on classrooms in general, and ability-based reading groups in particular. Perhaps this is because instructional conversations are rarely found in classrooms.

Within this type of speech event, learning is conceived of as the negotiation of meaning, and classroom discourse may take a form that is more open than traditional classroom lessons. Students may be more likely to initiate or explore ideas and ask questions. Vygotskian perspectives suggest that such discussions facilitate the active construction of meaning and display of knowledge by students.

Although existing studies of the instructional environment of ability-based reading groups have helped to shed light on the variable of ability by examining particular features of the learning environment, rarely have the same ability group members' participation been examined when using different types of print materials or when engaged in different types of reading activities (See Au, 1980; Au & Mason, 1981; & Brown & Palincsar, 1989) for exceptions). Additionally, although research indicates that high readers tend to engage in more meaning-oriented activities compared to their low group peers, few studies have examined the nature of these differences-- for example, what is the nature of these different reading activities with regard to social dimensions such as how turns are allocated, the nature of the teacher's questions, and how these activities support or constrain student talk.

It seems that investigations of students' participation in ability-based reading groups must focus on the interrelationships between the type of materials used, the

reading activities engaged in and the discourse that is constructed among the group members and their teacher.

Focus of the Study

This study examines the interrelationships between the academic and social dimensions of ability-based reading group contexts as they are constructed throughout the year and how variations in particular features of these learning environments impact on students' participation. More specifically, this study examines the types of materials used, and the reading activities engaged in by ability group members and how these features of the learning environment affect the nature of the groups' discourse and student participation.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What patterns of interrelationships can be identified between the nature of the reading activity, the type of materials used, and the discourse that is constructed within and across groups over the school year?
2. What is the nature of the students' participation in these different learning environments?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study draws on theoretical constructs from Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and the sociocultural school of cognitive development, sociolinguistics, education, anthropology, and sociology. Theory and research on the social foundations of cognitive activity, the relationship between context and development, and classroom learning activities as sociocommunicative contexts as well as academic contexts, are integrated to create a framework for understanding how variation in literacy contexts shapes group members' participation in reading group events.

The Social Foundations of Cognitive Activity

Much of the current thinking about reading and literacy learning in general has been influenced by sociocultural theories of development (Leontiev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). A basic theme that runs throughout this framework is the social foundations of cognition. According to Vygotsky (1962; 1978), individual cognitive activity has its origins on the interpersonal plane. That is, through joint social activity cognitive activity is mediated through a socially elaborated system of signs. This perspective views the use of language, both oral and written, as the primary mechanism through which this process

of mediation takes place and through which the novice comes to regulate his or her own cognitive functioning. Another important and related theme in Vygotsky's writings is the emphasis placed on the social nature of the learning process and the role of instruction in the development of cognitive processes. Emphasis is placed on the role of the "teacher" as mediator of both what and how knowledge is acquired and used. An important concept in Vygotsky's theory that addresses this transfer of cognitive functioning from one individual to another is the concept of the "zone of proximal development." This zone refers to the distance between what the learner can do independently and what she can do in collaboration with a more experienced individual or individuals. Effective instruction provides the temporary support for the child's performance so that she can extend her activity beyond what could be accomplished independently. This leads to the internalization of the skill so that the child is able to perform the task independently. According to this view, children learn to regulate their own actions "by incorporating into the structure of their own activity, and eventually internalizing the organizational principles inherent in the assistance which they receive from others" (Wozniak, 1980, p. 176).

Researchers have extended Vygotsky's ideas to the study of caregiver-child interaction (Ninio & Bruner, 1978;

Rogoff & Gardner, 1984; Wertsch, McNamee, McLane, & Budwig, 1980; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Wood & Middleton, 1975). This work offers evidence that the adult's guidance, support, and structuring of the child's participation in activities can facilitate development of cognitive processes such as language and thinking skills and memory-related processes. With regard to language learning, young children learn language in the process of using it in supportive contexts. It is this variation across contexts that accounts, in part, for the variation of development across different activities (Heath, 1983; Rogoff, 1982).

Classrooms as Contexts for Literacy Development

Investigators from a variety of disciplines have addressed the importance of the social and linguistic context for understanding the process of cognitive development in general and reading in particular (Bloome, 1989; Cazden, 1988; Eder, 1982; Erickson & Shultz, 1981; Green & Harker, 1988; Mehan, 1979). These researchers have examined classroom learning activities as socially constructed contexts which place certain cultural, social, and communicative demands on individuals in addition to academic demands. Within this approach interactions in classroom activities are viewed as requiring competence not only in the structural aspects language (e.g., grammatical constructions) but in the functional aspects as well (i.e.,

sociocultural knowledge of how to use language appropriately). This ability has been referred to as communicative or interactional competence (Hymes, 1971; 1974; Mehan, 1979). Classroom communicative competence is an end in itself, as well as a means of achieving other educational objectives. In order to participate effectively in the life of classrooms, children must have more than academic knowledge alone. They must also acquire competence in social knowledge as well. As Mehan (1979) has stated:

Students not only must know the content of academic subjects, they must learn the appropriate form in which to cast their academic knowledge... They must know with whom, when, and where they can speak and act, and the must provide the speech and behavior that are appropriate for a given classroom situation. Students must also be able to relate behavior, both academic and social, to varying classroom situations by interpreting implicit classroom rules [p. 133].

Classroom contexts consist of both cognitive and social dimensions that are mutually constitutive in activity settings and are united through speech (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993). In these events that children acquire both linguistic and sociocultural competence (Gutierrez, 1995). Within this framework, the role of language, social interaction, and activity are essential features in understanding instructional contexts and their impact on learning and cognitive development.

Sociolinguists and educational researchers have examined how individuals co-construct contexts for learning

through their social interaction and talk, and how these contexts in turn shape the ways in which individuals participate in classroom activities. This work has examined both the social organization of interaction in classrooms as well as how language is used in classroom contexts (Au, 1980; Au & Mason, 1981; Eder, 1982; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982; DeStefano, Pepinsky, & Sanders, 1982; McDermott, 1976; Mehan, 1979).

Research on classroom interactions has provided insight into how students get to display competence, how students may be evaluated, and how cultural differences may be manifested in the classroom (e.g. Au, 1980; Leacock, 1969; Philips, 1972). Other investigators have examined how people use language to structure a range of communicative situations, such as teacher-led instruction (Mehan, 1979).

Other studies have focused on the relationship between language and participation structures (e.g. turn-taking) and the ways in which this organization affects access to instructional resources such as teacher attention or opportunities to practice academic skills (see Au, 1980; Mehan, 1979; Philips, 1972). This body of research has emphasized the role of instructional talk in both the construction and accomplishment of reading events and suggests that styles of participation and ways of interacting with and communicating about print vary across

reading group levels (Borko & Eisenhart, 1989; Eder, 1982).

Much of this research has been influenced by the work of ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks (1972) and builds on the sociological tradition of conversational analysis of turn-taking and sequencing of conversational moves (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Within this perspective, classroom reading events are communicative events that are governed by rules or norms for interaction and are constituted by people during face-to-face interaction.

Conversational analysts have shown that all conversations follow organizational principles of their own which are in large part independent of the grammatical structure of component utterances. These principles are illustrated by the adjacency pairs such as question-answer, greeting-greeting, and request-acknowledgement (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Levinson, 1983; Mehan, 1979). Although produced by different speakers, the two members of such pairs are reciprocally related in the sense that the first member sets the condition for the occurrence of the second while the second is dependent on the prior occurrence of the first. Furthermore, once a first member has been produced, the speaker must cede the floor to another who is expected to produce a suitable reply.

Research examining communication patterns during classroom lessons have examined whole group events (Erickson

& Shultz, 1981; Griffin & Humphrey, 1978; Mehan, 1979; Wallat & Green, 1979). Other research has focused on small ability-based groups (Eder, 1982; McDermott, 1976). The most common form of verbal interaction in the classroom is the traditional lesson or recitation script. Researchers have consistently found that talk comprising traditional classroom lessons usually functions primarily to transmit the teacher's knowledge, and the type of questions that are asked typically require the student to provide the correct factual answer rather than his or her reasoning. Turn taking is primarily controlled by the teacher (Cazden, 1986; 1988, Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1983).

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1979) and McDermott (1976) among others have demonstrated that instructional talk is characterized by a three-part sequence of moves: the teacher initiates interaction by eliciting a response from students, a student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response. Instructional talk differs from ordinary conversation in that the teacher typically offers feedback which follows the response to an initial move. This results in the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) discourse sequence.

Mehan (1979) describes classroom lessons as jointly constructed alternations of verbal and nonverbal behavior between teachers and students. These interactional

sequences are jointly constructed and perform particular functions in specific places in the organization of lessons. For example, he identifies four types of elicitations that function to exchange different types of academic information. Each of these initiation acts co-occur with certain types of responses. According to Mehan, these co-occurrence relationships bind initiation and reply acts. For example, the choice elicitation calls upon the respondent to agree or disagree with a statement provided by the questioner. This type of elicitation contains the information that the respondent needs in order to form the reply and requires the respondent to only agree or disagree with the teacher's statements. The product elicitation asks respondents to provide a factual response such as a name, a place, a date, or a color. The process elicitation asks for respondents' opinions or interpretations. The metaprocess elicitation asks students to formulate the grounds of their reasoning by requiring the respondent to provide the rule or procedure by which they have arrived at or remembered answers. One may view these different elicitations as focusing students' attention on different cognitive levels or constraining students' thinking and ability to display their knowledge.

Mehan's interactional analyses of classroom lessons has also found that all initiation acts are governed by turn-allocation procedures that specify the next speaker. He

identifies three procedures by which teachers allocate turns to students. Individual nominations select a particular child to respond. Invitations to bid solicit students to volunteer for a turn. This is most typically accomplished by raising one's hand. Invitation to reply opens the floor for anyone to respond. According to Mehan, these procedures operate under normal conditions. In order for interaction in these lessons to proceed smoothly, a turn-allocated by the teacher must be taken by a student or students. Successful turn-allocation requires complementary turn taking. The teacher employs these procedures to help insure that academic instruction is conducted in an orderly manner. Mehan also found that students rarely initiate their own turns during classroom lessons.

These studies have shown the importance of understanding the rules governing participation in classroom lessons. In other words, school achievement is in part a function of the means by which children are allowed to participate in a classroom lesson. That is, how a lesson is socially structured can influence children's willingness or ability to attend to a cognitive task.

Ability-based reading instruction is one type of reading context that research has shown offers differential learning opportunities to students.

Ability-Based Reading Groups

Grouping children for reading instruction on the basis of ability remains a prevalent classroom practice today in spite of a substantial body of research which provides evidence that supports the view that children are offered differential instruction when they are members of ability-based reading groups (Barr & Dreeban, 1991; Collins, 1986; Hiebert, 1983).

Allington (1980a), in his examination of teachers' responses to students' reading errors, found that the teacher provided different types of feedback to students of different ability levels. Teachers more frequently interrupted low group members who made oral reading errors than good readers who made similar errors, regardless of the semantic appropriateness of the error. Teachers also tended to provide low group members with graphemic or phonemic cues, whereas more of their comments to high group members directed attention to semantic and syntactic information.

McDermott (1976) found that in the high reading group, the system of turn taking allocated by the teacher was to ask each child to read in turn, that is, in a round-robin fashion. In contrast, in the low reading group, turn-taking was managed more on a turn-by-turn basis. This resulted in some of the poor readers not gaining access to a turn. In a study of first grade reading groups, Eder (1982) found that different communication norms were established across

reading ability groups. In particular, she examined the frequency of children's initiations and interruptions made during instruction and the teacher's response to the children's participation. Eder's results indicate that in the beginning of the year the members of the two highest groups made more initiations and more topically relevant initiations than the members of the two lowest groups. This pattern was consistent across the year.

With regard to the timing of children's utterances (i.e., interruptions), Eder found that in the beginning of the year, students at all levels frequently interrupted other students' reading turns during reading lessons. She also found that the teacher's response to reading turn violations varied across groups. In particular, high group members' reading turn violations were more likely to be reprimanded than the other groups. When low group members spoke out of turn the teacher did not reprimand their interruptions; rather she often acknowledged them, particularly when the interruptions were topically relevant. Eder suggests that because the high group members were more verbal than low group members early in the year, the teacher may have discouraged high group members from talking, while at the same time encouraging discussion from low group members. Furthermore, she adds that the teacher was most likely concerned about maintaining the interest of low group members during other students' reading turns. As a result

of these different participation norms across the groups, the high group members interrupted less frequently at the end of the year compared to the low group members. Eder concludes that children who are members of different groups are learning different ways of communicating and participating in literacy events.

In another study, Eder (1981) reported that a teacher spent twice as much group time in managerial acts with the low-ability groups as with the high-ability one. Since time spent on the management of behavior has been found to be negatively correlated with learning, this finding suggests that low-ability students may have diminished opportunities to receive reading instruction (Hiebert 1983).

In a comparison of the instructional contexts of high and low group reading activities, Collins (1986) found that the low group interactions were characterized by "more turn violations by peers, fewer topic elaborating questions from the teacher, and more time spent managing attention" compared to the lessons involving their higher ranked peers (p.65). Collins concludes that the type of discourse style that was constructed among the teacher and the group members constrained the types of opportunities students had to construct and display their knowledge.

Although these studies have shed light on some of the patterns of student participation in ability-based reading events and its relation to instructional interaction, the instructional contexts examined have typically involved the use of basal readers and a round-robin turn-taking structure. These studies have not examined the relationship between the turn-taking structure and variations in the type of materials used, the activity engaged in and the larger discourse format of the speech activity (e.g., recitation structures versus more discussion-oriented formats. We may ask, for example, is a more rigidly structured turn-allocation structure as that found in recitation discourse formats more likely to "inhibit" child initiations compared to a more open structure, such as that found in more discussion-oriented activities? What about the nature of the curricular materials used during reading group instruction.

In her study described earlier, Eder (1982) mentioned that the nature of the high reading group's activities may have influenced the observed level of this groups' participation (i.e, higher frequency of initiating behaviors). That is, the high group more frequently engaged in activities which were more discussion-oriented compared to the other groups. Unfortunately, however, Eder did not explore this more local aspect of the social organization across groups and its relationship to the children's

participation. Instead, she attributed group differences in participation to differences in the children's communicative competence and to the teacher's differential feedback style across groups.

Even within one type of classroom grouping practice, such as ability-based reading groups, academic and social dimensions may vary within groups as well as across groups. For example, while it has been found that low reading groups typically engage in reading activities that focus on decontextualized components of prints (e.g., word identification activities), and involve basal readers (Wiggins, 1994), there are times when low-ranked groups engage in more contextualized literacy activities, as when engaged in a storybook reading session. I argue that an examination of the nature of low group members' participation across different types of reading activities is necessary to better understand the relationship between instruction and learning during ability-based reading groups.

Indeed, Barr (1987) identifies curricular materials as an important condition influencing the organization and nature of instructional interaction. Barr's analysis of the role of curricular material in a high school English class revealed that once the curricular materials were established, they constrained and supported instruction. She describes four ways in which curricular materials have a

bearing on instructional interaction and learning. First, curricular materials function as an organizing rubric by providing substantive linkages among a variety of instructional activities. Second, materials influence classroom interaction. Barr presents evidence which suggested that the level of class discussion (text-based versus interpretive) was responsive to the relative difficulty of the materials. Third, materials are an integral part of class interaction. In her analysis, question-answer recitational units were classified in relation to story content in order to determine the extent to which the interaction focused on the story line versus beyond-text interpretation. And finally, materials served as a predictor of learning, the content of instruction had direct implication for what might be learned during instruction.

Several intervention studies and programs exist which have made manipulations of the instructional-social context, such as the materials used or the activities engaged in, which has resulted in a change in children's participation. The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program designed to improve the educational achievement of native Hawaiian children who are at high risk for educational failure (Au, 1980; Au & Mason, 1981). These intervention studies employ particular instructional strategies with the

goal of improving children's participation in the literacy events and hence their learning. This program modifies both the participation structures (one speaker at a time to "talk story" structure) and the instructional focus (modified to place greater emphasis on meaning and comprehension) of the event. These studies have shown that a shift in the nature of the instructional context, such as a modification in the participation structures, can influence the way children participate in the instructional event.

Au and Mason (1981) compared the behaviors of two teachers with the same reading group. These teachers varied in their previous contact with the Hawaiian culture of the children. The two teachers interacted very differently with the group, with the "high contact" teacher's lessons following interactional patterns similar to those in the children's culture and the "low contact" teacher's interactional patterns similar to those present in mainstream culture classrooms. These differences were highly related to the achievement-related behavior of student such as time engaged in reading, rate of reading responses, and rate of discussion.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) articulate a theory of instruction based on Vygotskian theory that evolved from their research and collaboration with the KEEP school. According to the authors, classrooms should be structured so that the interactions between teachers and students take the

form of instructional conversations, where each can learn from the other in a reciprocal fashion as children proceed from socially mediated interaction to higher levels of independent work. It is important to note that in order for this approach to be effective, teachers must provide students with not only more open discourse structures for talk during learning but also assisted performance through verbal prompts to guide them as they learn. Such discourse reflects the view that learning is an active process in which students construct knowledge (Cazden, 1988; Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). However, this has not yet been widely reflected in the classroom-discourse literature. This is due, in part, to the paucity of instances of discussion in elementary classrooms. Instructional conversations have been described as marked by less teacher control over both the allocation of turns and the knowledge that is exchanged. Children are asked questions that encourage the display of their thinking and understanding over factual or correct responses to questions. Within this type of speech event, talk is used as a tool for learning (Wells, 1986).

Tierney and Rogers (1989) examined the relationship between classroom literacy practices and the literacy behaviors and perceptions of individual students. The authors compared one classroom in which the teacher used a basal approach, trade books, and a separate creative writing

lesson twice a week. This teacher largely initiated the reading and writing experiences of the students. In a second classroom, the teacher used a conference approach to reading and writing and provided students with more extended and integrated reading and writing opportunities. Students were given more opportunities to initiate their own interactions with the teacher and with peers. Their findings indicate that in the first classroom, the interactive structure was a variation on the IRE structure, where the teacher had the knowledge and the children were to provide the right answer. In the second classroom, the interactions were also a variation on the IRE cycle, but in this class, there were more instances of sharing authority of the interpretation of a text, that is, interactions allowed for the child to modify the teacher's interpretation. In addition, there were a variety of literacy events with varying social rules and norms. In this case, the social rules changed when the text being discussed was written by a student author.

Tierney and Rogers examined the consequences of these instructional patterns on the students' perceptions of the processes of reading and writing and their reading and writing behaviors. They found that across the two classrooms, there were differences in the extent to which students were willing to wrestle with problems for themselves and to initiate their own problem solving

strategies. The authors conclude that the variations in the social fabric of the two classrooms seemed to correlate with variations in the social rules and norms of classrooms, and that these interactions sent signals to students about what the academic task demands were. In the first classroom, the interaction patterns served to limit the students' literacy experiences. For instance, the teacher was always the sole audience of the students' work and the sole authority on how texts should be interpreted. In the second classroom, students were allowed to participate more fully in the processes involved in reading and writing and students exhibited more sophisticated understandings of those processes.

McCollum (1989) conducted a comparative analysis of turn allocation in two classrooms to illustrate how literacy instruction is constructed among different social groups. He examined student-teacher interactions during teacher-directed whole-group lessons in two third grade classrooms; one English-speaking teacher who had a traditional instructional approach, the other a Spanish-speaking teacher and students in Puerto Rico. McCollum found that the rules for turn allocation and underlying social relations were different in the two classrooms. A comparison of teacher-directed whole-group lessons showed that the discourse in lessons in the more traditional classroom was characteristic of traditional "lessons as recitation,"

whereas those in the teacher's class in Puerto Rico resembled "instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The teacher in Puerto Rico preferred more open structures -- frequently engaging the children in conversation, asked questions that were most often framed with the invitation to reply turn allocation device, which is the least controlling strategy and opens the floor to everyone by using wh-questions, chorus elicitation, or sentence-completion forms. An example of the invitation to reply or open bid procedure would be, "Tell me about the book." In contrast, the EuroAmerican teacher cast lessons in the recitation mode most frequently, using the most controlling strategies, individual nomination and invitation to bid, to elicit student responses during lessons. When individually nominating a student, the teacher selected and named the student who was to speak next in the lesson.

Mason, McCormick and Bhavnagri (1986) argue that one way teachers may foster successful participation in group reading lessons is to give children opportunities to generate verbal statements about the stories they are reading. Their study addresses the issue of how teacher-student interaction procedures might be established to provide such opportunities for children. The authors argue that talking about a lesson or a book or story helps young children because they: a) begin to distance themselves from

the topic and treat it more "as an object" of comprehension; b) begin to use reading strategies for figuring out how to participate in reading activities; and c) begin to monitor their understanding of the topic. To foster successful group reading, the authors suggest that teachers use different social interaction patterns in the class that lead children to develop higher-level verbalizations and that provide opportunities for children to monitor their own understanding.

Thus, in school contexts, variance in competence might be understood to be the result of students' access to and participation in varying activities, classroom participation structures, and forms of classroom discourse. This variance in competence among members of classrooms results, in part, from the varying rules of interpretation, topics, patterns of interaction (e.g., turn-taking), and uses and forms of language in the classroom (Hymes, 1974). Of importance, then, is the degree to which students have access to both linguistic and social knowledge embedded in and transmitted by the discourse of the classroom. Through participation in learning activities, students learn both the structure of lessons and the ways to talk about what they know (Mehan, 1979). However, if students are not given an opportunity to participate in legitimate learning contexts from which they can acquire the social and communicative knowledge needed to participate, they may learn very little from the classroom

experiences in which they participate (Wilkinson, 1982).

The conception of competence as a social construct requires an understanding that classroom competence is facilitated by participation in and the appropriation of both academic and social knowledge transmitted through meaningful classroom discourse. This conception of competence as a social construction provides the basis for understanding that classroom competence is not constructed by individuals; instead, competence is bidirectional, involving both students and teacher (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979).

At the present time, the literature on ability-based reading groups does not adequately address the instructional and communicative demands that exist within and across ability groups, taking into consideration both academic and social dimensions of instructional interaction. A more dynamic approach to ability-based reading group instruction and student participation is necessary to understand the interrelationship between instruction and learning. Our interpretations of observed patterns of participation, of both teacher and students, need to be informed by an understanding of the instructional contexts of which they are a part before adequate comparisons across groups as well as within groups can be made. We know very little about the interrelationships between academic and social dimensions and children's participation in reading events. In addition

we know little about these dimensions within groups over time, or when some aspect of the context changes (such as the materials) as well as across groups, (e.g., high and low groups). When considering reading development, educators and researchers need to bear in mind that the complex process of learning to read occurs in complex social-instructional contexts and that features of these contexts can contribute to children's interactions with text in important ways. A complete understanding of reading development can only come about when the interaction of reader and text is studied within different instructional-social contexts.

Given that ability groups form the primary setting for many children's interactions with text in classroom settings, determining what happens in different groups and describing the effects of these experiences are basic to understanding children's development. To better understand how they operate to affect children's participation during ability-based reading instruction, an examination of the interrelationships between the academic dimensions (e.g., type of literacy knowledge emphasized, and print materials used), and the social dimensions of the group (i.e., both type of instructional group and the more local social dimensions such as the rules for participation), is needed.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Site Selection

To identify a variety of teaching styles and reading contexts in first-grade classrooms, preliminary observations were conducted in several classrooms in different schools located within the New York Metropolitan area. Based on these early visits, two first-grade classrooms in one school were selected for participation in six months of pilot observations and interviews. At the end of the preliminary research, one of the two teachers was selected to participate in the study reported here. The selection process was based on the teacher's instructional philosophy, classroom reading practices, professional background, and willingness to participate in the research.

The Setting

The study took place in a New York Metropolitan Public School, situated in an ethnically- and economically- mixed community. One first-grade classroom, consisting of one teacher and twenty-eight children (16 girls and 12 boys), participated in the study. The children's ages ranged from 5 years, 9 months to 6 years, 9 months. Table 1 describes the ethnic background of the students.

Table 1

Ethnic Background of the Students

Ethnic Background	Boys		Girls	
	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)
African-American	2	(16.7)	2	(12.5)
Asian-American	1	(8.3)	0	(0.0)
Euro-American	8	(66.7)	13	(81.3)
Latino	1	(8.3)	1	(6.3)

As Table 1 shows, the majority of the children in the class were European-American followed by African-American, Latino, and Asian-American. The teacher, Beth, was European-American.¹ At the beginning of the school year, Beth was entering her tenth year of teaching and was considered an expert teacher by her supervisor and peers. The year this study was undertaken, Beth served as a mentor teacher to a novice first-grade teacher in the same school.

Contexts for Literacy Learning

Based on the pilot research and discussions with Beth, two regularly occurring reading practices, one whole group and the other small group, were selected for systematic

¹ All names used in reference to this study are pseudonyms.

observation. The classroom participants referred to these events as Morning Meeting and Reading Time, respectively. Although the main focus of this study was on ability-based reading groups instruction, my observations of Morning Meetings as another instructional context that was teacher-directed and one which Beth believed was a formal time to teach reading, served to situate ability-based reading groups within the larger classroom context.

The selection process for these two reading contexts was based on the following criteria: 1) the two events occurred on a regular basis, 2) the teacher viewed the contexts as ones in which reading occurred, 3) the contexts were representative of first-grade instructional practices, 4) the two events were comprised of teacher-led activities, and 5) the two events were suitable for videotape recording.

Morning Meeting, one of the few occasions when Beth arranged the children for whole-group instruction, typically served as the first official classroom event of every school day. A variety of literacy activities occurred during this instructional event, including attendance and calendar activities and storybook reading.

Reading Time, a classroom event specifically organized for small group reading instruction, typically followed Morning Meeting on most school days. This event consisted of a variety of both teacher-directed and child-directed grouping patterns with a variety of literacy activities

available to the children. Activities included reading a variety of print materials such as books, poems, basal readers, and word cards. Children also engaged in listening center and writing activities. Ability-based reading group instruction occurred during this classroom event.

Procedure

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection took place from September through May of one academic year. The tools employed to collect the data were: 1) field notes and classroom observations, 2) regularly scheduled videotape recordings of Morning Meeting and select Reading Time events, and 3) teacher interviews. Each of these techniques are described below.

Field Notes and Classroom Observations. Notes on the instructional grouping arrangements and activities observed during Morning Meeting and Reading Time events were recorded for two full days prior to the introduction of the video camera. After the introduction of the video camera, I continued to record notes on each of these events. These field notes supplemented the video recordings and aided the interpretative analysis of the data.

Videotape Recordings. The videocamera was introduced to the classroom on the third day of data collection in mid-September. A Panasonic AG60 camcorder, a Vidcor auxillary wide-angle lens, and a tripod were used to record the reading events. A Sennheiser shotgun microphone

was placed on the camera to record the Morning Meetings. To record ability-based reading instruction, the shotgun microphone was often replaced by a small wireless microphone that was sometimes worn by the teacher, by a child, or placed in the middle of the reading circle, depending on the nature of the group's activity. While at first the teacher and children were aware of the camera's presence in the room, it shortly became another classroom prop and did not appear to significantly influence classroom behavior.

Videotaping Procedures. Morning Meeting and Reading Time events were videotaped approximately three days each week, with the exception of class trips and days when the school was closed (e.g., holiday breaks). The day of the week was varied. Taping began in early September and continued through the end of April.

To record Morning Meeting, I set the video camera in a corner of the classroom behind the meeting area. The angle of the camera was focused on the rug area where the teacher and children gathered for the meeting. The record button was pressed just before the children entered the classroom in the morning and taping continued for the entire length of the event. During this time I sat beside the camera, occasionally adjusting the angle to follow the wave of activity of the group.

To record each reading group, the camera and tripod were positioned to focus on Beth and the students with whom

she was meeting for that day. The record button was pressed prior to the opening of the lesson and taping continued until after the group dispersed. When ability-based reading groups were formed during Reading Time, videotaping focused exclusively on these groups. In addition to video recording ability-based reading groups, I continued to take notes on the other types of grouping arrangements that occurred during Reading Time events throughout the year.

Teacher Interviews. It was an assumption of this research that Beth's beliefs about reading acquisition, reading instruction, and individual student's reading abilities would shape her instructional practices, (e.g., grouping children for instruction) and the ways she participated in instructional interactions with students. To inform the analyses of the instructional interactions observed during Morning Meeting and Reading Time events, informal interviews with Beth were conducted regularly throughout the school year. In addition to these conversations, three formal interviews were conducted. The first interview occurred in the beginning of the school year and focused on Beth's beliefs about how children learn to read, the strategies involved in teaching beginning reading, the types of materials she would be using to teach reading, and her instructional practices during Morning Meeting and Reading Time events.

The second interview took place several months into the school year and focused on Beth's definitions of good and poor readers, her practices for grouping children for reading instruction, her perceptions of individual children's reading abilities, and the strategies she employed to track children's reading progress. At the time of this interview, Beth had assigned the majority of the children to ability groups.

The third interview took place towards the end of the year and focused on Beth's perception of changes in Morning Meeting and Reading Time events since the beginning of the year. Of particular interest were her perceptions of changes in the type of activities that occurred and in the ways the children participated in these events.

Data Collection Schedule

The data were collected over a period of nine months to identify the patterns of change and/or stability that occurred in the instructional practices during Morning Meeting and Reading Time events across the school year. Although classroom observations and videotape recordings of these reading contexts were conducted on a continuous basis, the data collection schedule was divided into three phases for purposes of data analysis. The three phases correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of the year.

Phase I consisted of a 12-week cycle of data collection that began in mid-September and ended in early December.

During this phase, 24 sessions of Morning Meeting and 19 sessions of Reading Time were recorded.

Phase II consisted of an 11-week cycle of data collection which began mid-December and ended in late February. During this phase, 22 sessions of Morning Meeting and 20 sessions of Reading Time were recorded.

Phase III consisted of a 9-week cycle of data collection that began in early March and ended in late May. A total of 19 sessions of Morning Meeting and 14 Reading Time sessions were recorded during this phase.

Data Analysis

To address the research questions, a multiple levels approach was taken in regard to data analysis. Based upon the preliminary analysis of all of the data I collected, I chose to describe Morning Meeting and Reading Time events on a macrolevel. The purpose of this analysis was to provide a broad characterization of the organization of the two classroom reading contexts. First, an approach similar to that outlined by Erickson and Shultz (1981) was employed to identify the constituent components of a context. All of the videotaped recordings of Morning Meeting and all four ability-based reading groups were previewed. The continuous flow of activity of each of the ability-based reading group sample events was segmented into its main subevents or phases. Lengthy notes were taken, noting the structure of the lessons, the participants involved, the type of print

materials used, the type of reading activities engaged in, and the physical location of the lessons.

General themes and working hypotheses were generated from these analyses which then informed the selection of a subsample of the data for a more in-depth analysis. To examine the interrelationships between academic and social aspects of ability group instruction, a discourse analysis was conducted on a sample of six reading group sessions: three high group and three low group. This sample of reading events included one session from the beginning, middle, and end of the year for each group. The two middle reading groups were not selected for this level of analysis because their reading instruction primarily took the form of vocabulary review and independent reading and because these two groups were not formed until the middle of the year. It was expected that group differences in the social organization of the reading context, the materials used, and the reading activities engaged in would shape the instructional discourse that emerged during ability group events and this in turn would shape students' participation in these reading events.

Reading session selection was based on a variety of factors including the type of curricular materials used, the activity engaged in, and the technical quality of the recording, (i.e., both audibility and completeness of the event), and the period of data collection.

The high group's reading instruction consisted primarily of using trade storybooks and engaging in story discussions. For the purpose of a contrastive analysis, two high group sessions were selected that involved a discussion of a story that the group was in the middle of reading, and one session involved each group member bringing a book of their choice to the group.

In contrast, the low group's reading instruction primarily involved the use of the Breakthrough materials². Although the low group worked with the Breakthrough materials for the majority of their reading group instruction, there were a few occasions when they worked with other types of materials. For purposes of a contrastive analysis, one Breakthrough activity, one basal reading activity and one storybook reading activity was selected for analysis.

Five features of each group's interaction were examined. These included: 1) teacher turn-allocation procedures, 2) student interrupting behaviors, 3) student initiations, 4) teacher feedback behaviors, and 5) teacher management acts. Each of these discourse features were examined within and across ability groups.

² Breakthrough, a commercially-produced set of materials, is designed to foster the development of children's sight-word vocabularies and knowledge of grammatical constructions. The materials consist of a large word chart which holds individual word cards and word card stands for constructing sentences. In addition, each child receives his or her own word card folder to store those words that comprise his or her sight-word vocabulary.

Teacher Turn-Allocation Procedures

According to Mehan (1979), the procedures teachers use to allocate turns is a part of every teacher initiation act, that is, each initiation act "not only specifies the action to be taken but also does the work of identifying the population of people who are to reply to the initiation (p. 84)." To identify how the teacher allocated turns during ability group instruction, each of her initiation acts of the exchange sequence was coded for the type of turn allocation procedure it used. Mehan (1979) identified three basic procedures by which teachers select respondents during traditional lessons: 1) Individual nomination, 2) Invitation to bid, and 3) Invitation to reply.

Individual nomination involves the teacher selecting a particular next speaker either by name or through some nonverbal gesture as in pointing or looking at the person.

Invitation to bid involves the teacher selecting a particular next speaker by first inviting students to signal that they want to respond. Hand raising is the most common method of bidding for the floor in most classrooms. Occasionally, however, students may also bid for the floor by "calling out."

Invitation to reply involves the teacher opening the floor for anyone to respond. This procedure enables students to nominate their own turns to participate as when

a teacher initiates an open-ended request such as "Tell me about the book." I refer to this procedure as an **open bid**.

In addition to these teacher-controlled strategies for the allocation of turns, there are occasions when students find opportunities to nominate their own turns that are unsolicited by the teacher as when a student volunteers a comment or asks a question. The occurrence of student self nominations were also noted.

Student Interrupting Behaviors

During traditional classroom lessons, teachers not only control how turns are allocated, they also control the timing of students' participation, that is when students gain access to the floor. What are the norms for the allocation of turns and how is this related to the type of student interrupting behaviors observed? It was expected that in reading activities in which open bids are more frequently used, there would be a higher frequency of overlapping speech and turn violations than in those cases of group instruction that are structured more like traditional lessons.

Based on an inductive analysis, three types of student interrupting behaviors were identified. These included:

- 1) **Turn violation** defined as an instance when a student has the floor and a second speaker interrupts for the purpose of displaying knowledge. This typically occurs before the first speaker completes his or her turn.

2) **Insertions.** Two types of insertions were identified in the data. **Type I Insertions** were Requests for clarification. These are requests for the speaker to repeat his or her utterance. **Type II Insertions** were Assistance behaviors. These are one student's attempt to assist or help another student who has the floor. Both types of interruptions typically occur before the nominated student responded.

3) A third type of interrupting behavior identified involves students speaking simultaneously. This type of interruption behavior was labelled, **Overlap**.

4) Interrupting behaviors that did not fall into one of the above three categories were coded as **Other**. This type of interrupting behavior occurred infrequently.

Student Initiations

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the three-part IRE sequence that is characteristic of traditional classroom lessons provides little opportunity for students to initiate exchanges that are unsolicited by the teacher (Cazden, 1986; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). In spite of this, there are times during reading group activities when students manage to gain access to the floor by initiating comments or asking questions that are unsolicited by either the teacher or other group members.

The frequency and content of students' voluntary initiations made within and across reading groups were

coded. Student initiations are defined as any unsolicited comment, statement, question, or nonverbal act that is offered voluntarily by a student(s) and is not simply a response to a previous act. Content codes were developed inductively based upon the analyses of the ability group reading events. These included: 1) **Metatextual** content, defined as initiations that focus on the metafunctions of print such as pointing out the beginning of a paragraph, 2) **Textual** content, defined as focusing on the content of the story or language form, 3) **Personal** content, defined as comments or statements regarding personal feelings about the text, and 4) **Procedural** content, defined as initiations that focused on the procedural aspects of the task such as a student indicating the page number from which he is reading, and 5) **Inappropriate Behaviors**.

Teacher Feedback Behaviors

Next, the teacher's responses to student initiations and student interrupting behaviors were coded. Teacher responses were coded into five categories: **Reprimand**, **Interrupt**, **Ignore**, **Acknowledge**, and **Respond**.

1. **Reprimand**: The teacher explicitly discourages the student from responding further.

Example: Mark: I WILL GO (reads text)
Teacher: Shhh.

2. **Interrupt:** The teacher stops the student before he or she has completed the turn.

Example: Nat: Two of my fish died/
 Teacher: Hold it. Before we get too involved in a fish discussion I want to get back to Molly.

3. **Ignore:** The teacher does not respond positively or negatively to the student's comment (i.e., the teacher does not say anything or does not orient her next comment to that student).

Example: Teacher: So how did you feel after your fish died, after you put all that work into it?
 (Addressing Nat)
 Cary : But not all of them. I had three of them and then one died and now I have two.
 Teacher: How did you feel after putting so much work into it, Nat?

4. **Acknowledge:** The teacher makes at least one comment related to the student's comment while oriented to that student.

Example: Edward: That says, GO
 Teacher: Yes. It says, GO, right there. You're absolutely right.

5. **Respond:** The teacher offers a reply to the student's question.

Example: Jack : What about the red bird?
 Teacher: The red bird doesn't talk on this page.

Teacher Management Acts

Teacher management acts are part of the social life of most classroom instruction but they also influence the cognitive aspects of instructional interchanges by functioning as temporary interruptions in the instructional flow of the lesson. Each reading group session was examined to determine the relationship between specific types of reading activities and the incidence of teacher management acts. **Teacher Management Acts** directed to the group were defined as verbal or nonverbal attempts by the teacher to keep or recall group members' attention to the task at hand.

Additionally, the timing of the management act was examined for whether or not it occurred in the middle of an exchange or at the boundary or juncture of an exchange. It was believed that those management acts that occurred in the middle of an exchange would be more disruptive to the cognitive flow of the instructional discourse than those occurring at the juncture or boundary of an exchange.

Coding Procedures

Verbatim transcripts of the six ability-based reading sessions, indicating both verbal and relevant nonverbal behaviors, were made. Each of the transcripts of high and low reading groups were analyzed by turn (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976). During reading group instruction, a turn was broadly defined to include both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This decision was made so that

students' verbal and nonverbal initiations and responses would be included in the analyses.

After each turn was numbered, each was coded for its speech act function based on Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) and Mehan's (1979) analytic framework. After this coding, turns were organized into exchanges to identify and describe the relation between turns within each of the reading groups over time and to examine the form and function of exchanges that occurred both within group lessons over time and between ability groups (See the Appendix for a detailed coding scheme).

CHAPTER IV

THE CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes the larger classroom environment in which the ability-based reading groups were situated. A description of the physical arrangement of the class, the material resources made available to students, the allocation of time to specific classroom activities, and Beth's beliefs about how to teach reading as well as her perceptions of students' reading abilities as expressed through formal and informal interviews, provide a context in which ability-based reading groups may be examined and understood.

The Physical and Material Environment

Beth arranged the physical environment so that it contained an area for whole-group instruction, a variety of well-defined learning centers, and clusters of tables for small group and individualized instruction. The physical arrangement of the classroom is depicted in Figure 1.

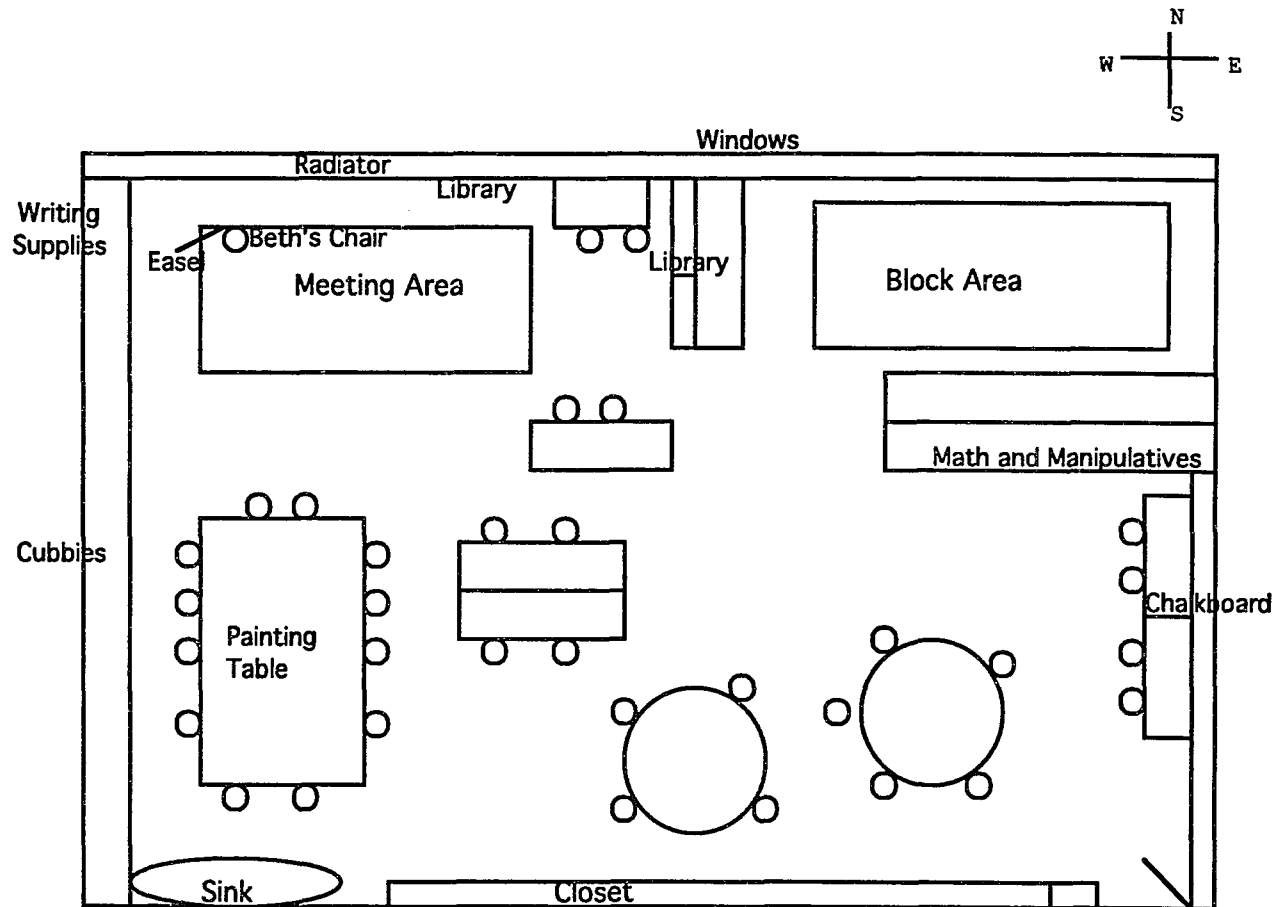


Figure 1. The physical arrangement of the classroom.

As Figure 1 shows, the north side of the classroom was lined by the radiator which served as a storage space for a variety of supplies and materials such as the students' poetry binders. Located at the northwest corner of the room was an area for whole-group instruction. This area, labelled the "Meeting Area" by the classroom participants, was physically defined by a rug, an easel, and the classroom library. Whole-group instruction such as morning and afternoon meetings took place in this area. In addition, Beth sometimes met with small groups of students for reading instruction on the rug. Before meetings and during open work times, students frequently sat on the rug and looked at books or engaged in school work.

The classroom library, a prominent feature in the meeting area, was filled with a large selection of trade books for children, a variety of oversized or Big Books, and basal readers. Workbooks, skill-building worksheets, alphabet and word charts, and the Breakthrough materials were also stored in this area.

Lining the west wall of the classroom were shelves which stored teacher-made reading games and classroom materials for writing and drawing. Students stored their writing in their work folders and journals. Later on in the year, Beth helped them "publish" their own stories which were publicly displayed on one of the book shelves in the meeting area. The students' cubbies, each clearly labeled

with their names in alphabetical order, were also located on this side of the room. A colorful display of posters, a number line that indicated an up-to-date total of the number of school days that had passed, and the day's schedule chart that listed the day's activities in order of occurrence, were displayed on the wall above the cubbies. The listening center, consisting of two audiocassette players, head phones, and audiocassettes of books was located on top of the cubbies. Later on in the year, an incubator, used for a class science project, was also placed in this area.

The clothes closets, classroom sink, and supplies for arts and crafts projects were located along the south wall of the classroom. An easel that was used to display written recipes for cooking was also located in this area. A large table used for a variety of activities such as painting, cooking, arts and crafts, and reading was present here as well.

The chalkboard, which Beth rarely used, lined the east wall of the classroom. Occasionally she used the board to list and review vocabulary words when meeting with one of the reading groups at the tables that lined this side of the room. The classroom math center was also located in this area. This center was supplied with a variety of math games and small manipulatives such as pattern makers and unifix cubes. Located in the northeast corner of the room was an amply supplied block-building center.

The Classroom Schedule

Beth's arrangement of the physical classroom space and the amount and type of print and print-related materials she made available to the students reflect the fact that reading and literacy learning in general was a central goal in her classroom. This goal was also realized by Beth's allocation of classroom time to reading and literacy activities in general.

Students began the day by lining up outside in the school yard or in the school's cafeteria depending on the weather conditions. Upon entering the classroom at approximately 8:50 a.m., there was a short period before the start of the first official event of the day. During this time, students were expected to put their belongings away in the closet and cubbies, to turn their name cards to the "in" position on the attendance chart, and if there was homework to hand in they were to place it in the designated basket. On Mondays, students were expected to look on the job chart to check their job for the week. After completing these activities, students were expected to sit down in the meeting area and wait for the Morning Meeting to begin. While waiting they could look at books. During this time, Beth typically engaged in last minute preparations for the day's instruction and organized materials.

Beth typically posted any changes to the day's schedule before the children arrived in the morning. The daily

schedule was comprised of activities that occurred on a daily basis (e.g., Morning Meeting and Reading) as well as activities that occurred once a week (e.g., French, Library, and Music) and only on occasion (e.g., class trips).

Morning Meeting was one of the few times during the school day when the class met as a whole group for instruction. For the majority of the year, this classroom event served as the first official event of the day. The meeting lasted approximately one hour, from 9 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. This was the main time when Beth informed the students of any changes to the schedule for the day. As she reviewed the day's events, Beth encouraged the students to read along with her. In the beginning and middle of the year, the group typically participated in daily attendance and calendar activities after the opening of the meeting. Following these routines, Beth engaged the students in a variety of activities such as storybook reading and singing songs. Later on in the year, attendance and calendar activities were dropped from the meeting as the group focused on other tasks such as whole-group shares of class news or discussions of class projects.

For the majority of the school year, Reading Time directly followed Morning Meeting and was approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length. On typical school days the sequence of activities was Meeting, Reading, Snack, Math, and sometimes French, Music, or Library, depending on

the day of the week. These events were followed by Open Work Time, Lunch, Recess, Writing, Clean-Up, and Dismissal.

Although the schedule remained the same for approximately two-thirds of the school year, towards the end of the year, there was a change in the day's schedule and Reading Time occurred in the early afternoon before Writing Time. Beth explained that she hoped that by having reading and writing occur in sequence "that each would feed each other more." She added that "the kids might go from looking at a book to having that spur an idea to help them with writing and visa versa." Often during these sessions, reading activities were combined with a variety of writing activities such as writing letters to pen pals, writing about books, and talking about their writing during whole-group sharing times.

The Reading Program

Within early childhood education, reading programs have typically been characterized as emphasizing either a whole language or skills-based orientation with regard to instructional emphases. A whole language approach most commonly associated with Goodman (1986) is based on the idea that children are active language learners and that reading and writing are best learned (and taught) through the engagement in meaningful and authentic tasks involving reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities (Halliday, 1978; Holdaway, 1979; Wells, 1986). Underlying

this approach is the notion that literacy concepts and skills are learned from whole to part (Edelsky, 1991; Goodman, 1986). The curriculum in a whole-language based classroom is learner centered and the materials made available to students include storybooks as well as student and teacher generated materials

A whole-language approach to literacy instruction is often contrasted against a skills-based perspective which is based on the idea that written language is learned through teacher-directed lessons and practiced as discrete skills that are taught sequentially. The curriculum is typically focused on the development of reading and writing proficiency (DeFord, 1984) and reading progress is regarded as the acquisition of a set of hierarchically ordered skills (Knapp & Shields, 1990). The materials of a skills-based approach to reading instruction typically include basal readers, worksheets, and writing workbooks.

In real classrooms, however, reading programs are seldom as monolithic in approach as the above dichotomy suggests. Teachers tend to use variety of methods to teach reading. This was the case in Beth's classroom. Beth defined her reading program as basically a whole-language approach, indicating that she tried to assist the student in discovering the "richness" of language and to encourage them to use world knowledge or experience to interpret texts as well as available clues in pictures to help them make

predictions. She also stated that she used a variety of reading materials to foster the awareness that books fall into particular patterns. She wanted the students to look for similarities across books by the same author as well as to look for patterns in books written by different authors.

Although Beth viewed her approach as basically one of whole language, she believed that different students learn through different strategies. She indicated that she did not expect to teach one reading strategy and have all of the students learn it. Because of this she indicated she used a variety of techniques to teach reading, including phonics and decoding strategies.

Strategies for Teaching Reading

Beth indicated that both the size of the print of a given text as well as whether or not the students could see the print were important components of reading instruction. For example, she explained that when the students were listening to her read a poem or story and they were not shown the print, they were being exposed to a kind of literature appreciation, and story structure. She added that the rhythm of the language was important for developing a sense of anticipation and an ability to make predictions about a story. She believed that the ability to make predictions was a critical feature of learning how to read.

Beth explained that the use of large print, as in the reading of a Big Book or print written out on the experience

chart, was also effective for teaching basic reading skills such as phonics, rhyming, and sight-word vocabulary. She added that many of the students did not leave spaces between the words in their own writing and that pointing to each word as she read a story to the students helped them see the separate words. Beth also used Big Books to help the students notice punctuation marks, italics, and the difference between upper and lower case letters. Additionally, Beth stated that Big Books could be used for teaching broader concepts about literacy that extended beyond reading skills. She explained that the Big Book version of the story, Madeline (Bemelmans, 1939), for example, could help the students learn a rhythm for language and poetry in addition to providing opportunities to learn basic skills involved in reading.

Beth indicated that she tried to teach reading skills in the context of a meaningful daily routine such as identifying initial and ending sounds of words or letter blends during the reading of a poem or story, or when going over the day's schedule. For example, to assist students in developing their sight-word vocabularies, Beth explained that she would write the sentences from a poem or story on strips of paper. After reading the poem she would mix up the order of the strips and have the students order each one in the correct sequence. Beth indicated that this activity enabled her to see which aspects of the printed language the

students were focusing on. Additionally, she stated that she tried to focus on individual words that had some type of "pull" for the students or words that she had already used so they would be able to recognize the words easily. Beth also indicated that she would be using games rather than workbooks for the reinforcement of skills because she believed the students would be more willing to use games on a repeated basis. It was her assumption that the reading games presented a more sensible context for learning than teaching skills in isolation.

The following excerpt from one of my interviews with Beth illustrates her understanding of reading in context during a Morning Meeting. In preparation for a social studies lesson, the students had interviewed several staff members in their school. After they completed their interviews the students met as a group and shared their findings with one another during one of the meetings. During this event, Beth encouraged the students to generate the different jobs the staff members held and she wrote the students' contributions on the experience chart:

"Today the Morning Meeting was basically a social studies meeting. What we did was to make a lot of words, now there's going to be a reading game that comes out of it and I think that that was really the kids' idea. But I think that that's important because they watch me write the words. They're going to be wanting to write those words. Those are words we're going to use a lot. They are words the students are probably going to use on signs. So although the application for reading is not clear at this very moment other than that they watch me write the words and make predictions about what sounds might be coming

up, that's writing and reading for a purpose. And why else would you do it? So, I think that that's teaching reading also."

Instructional Contexts for Formal Reading Instruction

Beth made it clear that she believed reading occurred throughout the day as when students read books together in a reading group or read directions to a math activity they were completing. Nevertheless, there were times during the school day when she arranged the students for more formal reading instruction. Morning Meeting and Reading Time were two classroom events that Beth designed for literacy instruction. These are discussed in greater detail below.

Morning Meeting Time: A Whole-Group Literacy Event

Beth indicated that she viewed Morning Meeting as the formal time to teach qualities of good reading and writing and to share information. Additionally, she stated that this time was an opportunity to teach reading skills, such as phonics and print conventions (e.g., punctuation and capitalization), and to help students develop their sight-word vocabularies. Because of daily constraints such as her preparation time and "outside time," Beth felt that this was the main time during the school day when there was approximately an hour to talk about reading and literacy-related topics or concepts, which could then be practiced during Reading Time.

As one of the few occasions for teacher-led, whole-group reading instruction, Morning Meeting was marked by a

variety of instructional props and activities. The easel played an integral role in all teacher-directed instruction during the meeting. The attendance chart, a permanent prop in this event, was located on one side of the easel. It was comprised of cardboard pockets, each with a child's name written out, in alphabetical order. Inside each of the pockets was a card that had the word, "in" written on one side and the word, "out" written on the reverse side. When the students arrived in the morning they were to turn their cards to the "in" position and at the end of the day, they were to turn their cards over to the "out" position. In the beginning of the year, Beth typically opened the meeting by going over the attendance for the day. In addition to recording the attendance for the day, she used this activity to teach reading in context and to conduct informal math instruction (e.g., counting the number of students present and absent).

The calendar and day-of-the-week chart, (a teacher-made chart with pockets reading "Today is", "Tomorrow will be", and "Yesterday was") were also regular meeting activities that occurred in the beginning and the middle of the year. Beth indicated that this activity helped the students to maintain a sense of sequence and continuity.

According to Beth, these activities served several functions. First, she explained that doing these activities on a regular basis established a regular activity structure

in the morning. Beth believed that it was important for the students to have a clear and predictable structure, particularly in the beginning of the year, because there were so many things that they were getting used to.

Second, Beth believed it was important for the students to see the variety of print available in the room such as their own and their classmates' names, and the words associated with the activity charts (e.g., the calendar) on a repeated basis so that they could begin to see patterns in the text and to acquire these as sight words.

In the following excerpt Beth describes how some of the students displayed this knowledge during one of the morning meetings:

Teacher: "And in fact some kids have seen patterns by looking at it [the name cards]. Like, I think Allan and Dan and Jack too, noticed that Mark, Marissa, and Mara all begin with M-A-R. And then Dan was noticing some other patterns, like all the names beginning with 'D' are together, and someone else noticed that all the names beginning with 'A' are together. So, in fact they were noticing some patterns by seeing each others' names, over, and over, and over again."

Following the attendance, schedule, and calendar activities, Beth typically engaged the students in a variety of reading activities. Sometimes she read poems or stories to the group. Sometimes she used large print as in the case of the Big Books or when she wrote songs or poems out on the large experience chart which rested on the easel. Towards the latter part of the year, some of these activities

occurred less frequently. When asked about this, Beth explained that in the first half of the year, the calendar activity helped to create a regular predictable structure. As the year progressed, however, she indicated that she placed greater importance on other activities such as reading poetry and literature. Beth also stated that she worked less frequently with the experience chart and Big Books towards the end of year because these materials no longer seemed appropriate. She explained that most of the students were reading during this period in the school year, and she felt that these materials would have been too easy for the students.

Reading Time

Beth viewed Reading Time as a time during the school day when students could practice the reading concepts, skills, and strategies they learned in Morning Meeting, such as print conventions, and using available clues (e.g., pictures or parts of words) to make predictions. This classroom literacy event was constituted by a variety of grouping arrangements within which students participated in a variety of reading activities, and worked with a range of curricular materials. To manage the class when she met with students in small groups or provided individualized reading instruction, Beth had students work on their own or with peers.

During the closing of the Morning Meeting, Beth typically announced which students or reading group she wanted to meet with. For those students who were not meeting with her immediately following the meeting, Beth announced a list of reading activities from which students could choose. Students could read books independently or with partners, play reading games, or listen to stories in the listening center. There were opportunities for the students to work in their poetry binders, complete worksheets, write in their journals about a book they were reading, draw pictures based on some reading they had done, and work with the Breakthrough materials.

In the beginning of the year, prior to the formation of ability-based reading groups, Beth asked for volunteers to meet with her as a group. During these sessions she introduced the Breakthrough materials and gave each child his or her own Breakthrough word card folder. After the formation of ability-based reading groups, however, these small mixed-ability groups were no longer observed during Reading Time.

In addition to the above grouping patterns, Beth met several times with the entire class to share opinions and ideas about books they were reading. These groups were observed towards the end of the year.

Individualized instruction, characterized by Beth working one-on-one with a student, was observed most

frequently in the beginning of the year and continued throughout the year. The function of this instructional activity varied depending on when in the year it occurred. In the beginning of the year, Beth met with individual children to make early assessments of their knowledge about print and to guide their placement in an ability-based reading group. In the middle of the year, she met with individual children to track their reading progress. During these sessions Beth recorded what each child was reading, the type of reading errors made, the types of strategies the child was using to make sense of the code, and what she thought the child should be reading next. Beth explained that although she tried to meet with each child approximately once a month, in reality, she did not have enough time to meet with all of them because of the demands of classroom management and the large number of nonreaders she reported having in the class. Toward the end of the year, Beth continued to meet with children on an individual basis to assess children's reading progress and to make recommendations for class placement into second grade.

Ability-based reading group instruction became one of the prominent reading activities during Reading Time. Four ability groups were formed over the course of the year. These groups usually met once or twice a week immediately following the Morning Meeting. In the beginning of the year, only two ability groups were formed--the high and low

groups. Initial observations of these two groups were made during the first week of November and continued over the course of the year. The other two groups, the middle high and middle-low groups, were first observed during the second week of January. Beth explained that there was a large group of children in the middle-ability range that she did not yet have the opportunity to meet with as separate groups before the Winter break. She did add, however, that she had organized these children into two separate groups in her record book.

Beth determined the initial membership of each group on the basis of her conceptions of good and poor reading behaviors and her informal assessments of students' reading abilities.

Beth's Conceptions of Good and Poor Reading Behaviors

An underlying assumption of this research was that Beth's conceptions of good and poor readers would serve as organizing strategies for the placement of students in reading ability groups. Given this, I asked Beth several questions regarding her conceptions of good and poor readers in general and about the students in her class, in particular.

When asked to describe the characteristics of a good reader, Beth indicated that, in general, a good reader was a child who used a variety of strategies such as context cues (e.g., scanning the pictures), decoding, and their sight-

word vocabulary to make sense of the codes. In contrast, Beth characterized a poor reader as a child who was easily distracted when reading or when he or she needed to focus on the task at hand and who "was not willing to try to go to the books to seek them out as any kind of a pleasurable thing." When asked for her thoughts on why some students may have difficulty learning to read, Beth stated that some students may not be interested or ready to learn how to read, or they may be intimidated by the process and afraid of failing. With regard to some of the students in the class whom she felt were in this category, she indicated that some of the students were very distractable and had a difficult time sitting still. She wondered if the distractibility level of some of the students might be a result of developmental immaturity or of a learning disability.

Beth's Assessment of Individual Learners' Reading Abilities Prior to Group Placement

In addition to her conceptions of the characteristics of good and poor readers, in the beginning of the year, Beth used a set of informal assessments to guide the placement of students into ability-based reading groups. Some of the assessments measured reading readiness skills or general knowledge and others measured reading behaviors more specifically. The type of general knowledge tested for included: (a) knowledge of letter names and sounds, (b)

knowledge of basic shape names such as a triangle, circle, and square, and of some color names, (c) knowledge of the child's home telephone number, address, and spelling of their first and last name.

Beth also assessed students' reading behaviors such as their sight-word vocabularies, fluency, and reading strategies by sitting with each child and having him or her read the first page(s) of a beginning reader book (e.g., Go Dog Go (Eastman, 1961), by reading from a basal reader, and by playing a teacher-made game, "Three Friends Go On A Trip," a basic vocabulary-building game.

During one of the my interviews with Beth in the beginning of the year, she indicated that she had the opportunity to work individually with the majority of the students in the class and had organized them into four basic categories of readers. She used the following terms to describe each: a) "Fluent Readers," b) "Emergent Readers," c) "Readers Who Are Getting There," and d) "Nonreaders/Readiness." Each of these will be described in turn.

a) "Fluent Readers" - Beth characterized the students in this group as "reading with fluency," "having a sight-word vocabulary," "being alert," "paying close attention," "having the ability to pick out initial and ending consonant sounds," "to match words and phrases," and "to sound out words." She added that these students "recognized that

books tell stories" and they were "willing to make guesses and use context cues to make sense of the code." Four students comprised this group.

Based on Beth's descriptions of the students in this group, I use the term, High Group to refer to this group in the future.

b) "Emergent Readers" - Beth characterized these students as "being alert and paying close attention," "having a basic sight-word vocabulary," "knowledge of different letter sounds and names," "the ability to match phrases and words," and the "ability to pick out initial and ending consonant sounds." She added that these students were "just beginning to pick up books and work their way through them using decoding strategies and context cues."

Beth described the reading behavior of the students in this group in the following way:

"What it really takes is that edge to keep on pushing and some of them are willing to do it. Some of them are intimidated by it [reading] they're all somewhat intimidated by the whole process. They're willing to push at it and to break through into it."

Ten students comprised this group. I use the term, Middle-High Group to refer to this group.

c) "Readers Who Are Getting There" - Beth stated that these students "were clear about the consonant sounds and had enough of a sight word vocabulary and paid close enough attention to be using the breakthrough folders but that their knowledge of letter sounds were shaky." She believed

these students "were not quite ready to look at a book and persevere their way through it." She felt that she "could not put a Breakthrough book in front of them with any confidence that they could work their way through it unless they recognized the particular words that were in the story." She did view these students, however, as "having more skills and more of a sense of what was going on" than the students in the readiness group. Six students comprised this group. I use the term, Middle-Low Group to refer to this group in the future.

d) "Nonreaders/Readiness Group" - Beth stated that the students in this group were "not ready to begin reading." She described these students as "not knowing their letter names," "having possible language processing problems," "being slow in other areas," "having no sight word vocabulary," and "having trouble discriminating initial sounds when hearing a word." Eight students constituted the membership of this group. I have applied the term, Low Group to refer to this group of students in the future.

Conclusion

Reading and literacy learning in general was of central importance in Beth's classroom. This was evidenced by the type of material resources Beth made available to students and her allocation of time to reading activities. Ability-based reading group instruction represents one classroom context when students had access to a critical classroom

resource-- the teacher. The following chapters will examine how the instructional resources of the classroom, such as the teacher and materials, were allocated across ability-based reading groups and how placement in these groups shaped the types of learning opportunities the group members had to practice reading.

CHAPTER V

ABILITY-BASED READING GROUPS AS CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING

This chapter examines the types of learning opportunities Beth provided to students when they were members of an ability-based reading group. In particular, the type of print material used and the type of reading activities engaged in by each of the groups were examined for how these features of the learning environment shaped the nature of the groups' discourse and, in turn, how this affected student participation. Additionally, any changes in these features of the learning environment observed across the year were noted.

Group Differences in the Type of Print Material Used

As described in the previous chapter, the classroom was filled with a variety of print and print-related materials which students were able to explore throughout the day during such classroom events as Morning Meeting, Reading Time, and Open Work Time. When students met with Beth for small group reading instruction, however, the range of materials they used was more limited. Table 2 presents the type of materials used by students when they were members of an ability-based reading group.

Table 2

Group Differences in the Type of Materials Used

Group	<u>n</u>	Materials Used			
		Trade Book	Basal Reader	Break through	Other
High	11	10	0	0	1
Middle-high	7	3	4	0	0
Middle-low	8	3	2	3	0
Low	10	2	1	6	1

Note. The values represent the number of observations made of each ability group across the year.

As Table 2 shows, students used three types of materials when they met for reading group instruction. These were: Breakthrough materials, basal readers, and trade storybooks. The frequency of use of each type of material varied with the ability level of the group. In all but one of their reading sessions, the members of the high group worked with trade storybooks. In contrast, the majority of the low group reading events involved the use of the Breakthrough materials.

Group members from the middle-high group worked with both basal readers and trade books, and the middle-low group members worked with all three types of materials. This pattern of print use across ability groups is unlike that discussed in the literature on ability group instruction.

Typically, research on ability-based reading instruction has primarily focused on classrooms where the teacher assigns basal reader texts to each ability group-- only varying the difficulty level of the reader by ability level. It is an assumption of this research that the type of reading material used for instruction is an important feature in the learning environment. The types of materials teachers use for instruction help to shape the task demands for learners and foster or constrain the different types of learning activities that are provided for students (Genishi, 1987). A brief discussion of the materials used by each ability is presented below.

The Breakthrough Materials. The cognitive or academic focus of these materials is on language forms such as high frequency word units (e.g., "I" and "Will") and grammatical constructions. As noted previously, these materials may be used to foster the development of students' sight word vocabularies. In addition to a skills emphasis, the materials require a set of procedures for use, that is, the manipulation of word cards.

Basal Reader Texts. This type of reading materials is prevalent throughout our nations schools (McMahon, Raphael, & Goatley, 1995). Basal readers may be characterized as graduated readers designed according to increased levels of difficulty. A dominant feature of this type of material is the control over the language forms and functions that

appear in the text, such as the occurrence of high frequency words and specific sentence patterns. An underlying assumption regarding the process of reading acquisition that is built-in to this type of material is that learning to read is an additive process (Clay, 1991). Units of print are presented in a predetermined sequence, believed to be associated with the developmental sequence of the skills.

Researchers and practitioners of reading instruction have argued against the use of basal texts for early instruction (Clay, 1991). Those who have argued against the use of these materials have stated that the stories are boring and repetitious for the reader, and the predetermined sequence of the units of print constrain teacher flexibility with regard to adapting instruction to the individual needs or interests of learners. Additionally, the control of language forms and functions has lead to contrived texts, presenting language that is unlike that which occurs naturally. Some critics have termed this type of language, "primerese."

According to Clay (1991)... "based on what we know about language learning, contrived texts that are constructed with controlled vocabulary ignore the established language production systems that children bring to reading, they distort the expectations children have developed from listening to stories, and they do away with many of the supports that might have made it easier for the

child to learn by himself (p. 185)."

Trade Storybooks. Trade books encompass a variety of literary genres including fiction, nonfiction, and biography. Trade books may be graduated according to developmental level (e.g., picture books, beginning reader books with limited print and where the pictures and the words are closely related, and chapter books).

Trade storybooks typically provide the teacher with greater flexibility to address the child's interests and needs in that the teacher together with students may decide on the stories to read. Clay (1991) states, "if it is assumed that young readers already understand the world in terms of their own experiences and know something about literacy and books then a story book would allow them to use their prior experience to make sense of what they are trying to do. Meaningful texts signal children on many occasions that they should get more information because something is not quite right. When meaningfulness is seen to be the first priority in a reading programme, the message is more important than the words or letters which are collectively only the carriers of meaning (p. 188)."

At first glance, one might argue that Beth's decisions to assign different types of instructional materials to groups of different ability levels is a pedagogically sound practice in that those students perceived as needing more practice in basic skills are offered more opportunities to

work with the Breakthrough materials. Likewise, those students who Beth perceived as more "fluent readers" are provided opportunities to read whole texts and to be involved in the selection of the books they read.

If, however, one were to assume that all students have the capacity to learn when they enter first-grade, one would expect to find growth or change in their skills and knowledge and therefore a subsequent change in the types of materials assigned to students, particularly in the lower reading groups. To address this, ability-based reading groups were examined with regard to the type of materials used across the year. These data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Changes in the Type of Print Material Used by Ability Group Members Across the School Year

Group	n	Phase I				Phase II				Phase III			
		TB	BA	BKTH	OT	TB	BA	BKTH	OT	TB	BA	BKTH	OT
High	11	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
Middle-high	7	--	--	--	--	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	0
Middle-low	8	--	--	--	--	0	2	2	0	3	0	1	0
Low	10	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	0	2	0

Note. The values represent the number of observations made of each ability group across the year. Dashes indicate that data were not available for the two middle reading groups in Phase I because these groups were not yet formed. TB= Trade book; BA=Basal Reader; BKTH=Breakthrough Materials; OT= Other.

As Table 3 shows, there was little change in the type of materials used by members of the high and low groups across the year. The members of the high reading group began the year working with trade storybooks, and continued to do so throughout the year with one exception. In sharp contrast to the high group, the members of the low group consistently worked more frequently with the Breakthrough materials as the year went on. In fact, of the four ability groups, the low group was the only one whose members did not "progress" to the use of trade books for the majority of their reading lessons.

The pattern of the type of materials used during reading instruction with the two middle ability groups reflects a progression towards the use of more meaningful texts such as storybooks. For the middle-high group, all of the sessions that were observed in the middle of the year involved the group members working with basal readers. By the end of the year, all of the observed sessions involved the use of trade books.

Compared to the other three ability-based reading groups, the members of the middle-low group used the greatest variety of materials during their reading group instruction. Of the total number of reading sessions observed in the middle of the year, an equal number involved the use of a basal reader and trade books. By the end of the year, the majority of the observed sessions involved the

use of trade books.

Beth's assignment of specific types of materials across ability groups is consistent with her perception and descriptions of the students with regard to reading behavior. The following section will address the types of activities ability group members engaged in when working with the different types of materials described above.

Group Differences in Types of Reading Activities

High Group

All of the high group's activities were meaning-oriented such as talking about the books they were reading, sharing their understandings of the text, and expressing their personal opinions about what they liked and disliked about the stories. The majority (9) of the high group reading activities that involved trade books focused on talking about the book the group was reading. Sometimes talking about the events or characters in the stories was coupled with reading aloud portions of the text. Rather than reading aloud portions of text simply for the verbal performance or display, when the high group members were asked to read portions of the text it was to display their understanding of the story events. For example, students were asked to find the part in the story where it explained how a certain event happened. In addition to providing opportunities for oral communication, high group reading activities often included written communication about the

books the students were reading. Their writing tasks included writing letters to a main character in one of the stories being read and writing their personal feelings about books they were reading in their reading journals.

Through their discussions, high group members learned about the metafunctions of print such as the use of italics or slanted lines to create meaning in a story, the notion of plot, and the genre of biography.

The one reading session that did not involve print materials consisted of a discussion about the types of books the group members liked and disliked. Prior to this reading session, several of the children in the group had voiced their opinion that they were bored with the book they had been reading. It was in this way, that the high group members were involved in the selection of the books they read and discussed during their reading group meetings.

Low Group

All six Breakthrough reading activities involved the identification of words in isolation or in the context of a simple sentence. These activities primarily involved sentence construction and read aloud tasks of short units of print (i.e., sentences of three-to-four words in length). Basically the Breakthrough activities involved tasks such as "Find the word, _____," and "Can you make this sentence, She will go, into a question, Will she go?" The writing tasks assigned to the students during Breakthrough

activities involved copying sentences into their reading journals, or completing sentences. There were few opportunities for the students to display their knowledge verbally. The majority of students' responses in these activities were nonverbal requiring the placement of a word card in the appropriate place on the sentence holder.

Although two of the low group sessions involved the use of trade books, the activities the group engaged in during these sessions differed from the other three ability groups. In fact, during these sessions, the members of the low group did not have their own copies of the book. Instead, they listened to Beth read the story aloud to them. At various parts in the text, the group members engaged in choral reading of the repetitive sentences in the stories.

In one of these sessions, Beth combined her reading of the story with a sentence sequencing activity. This activity consisted of the students identifying the strip of paper that had the appropriate sentence of the story written on it. After this, she asked the students to place the sentence strip in the correct sequence to match the sequence of the story.

The one session that involved the use of a basal reader involved a round-robin read aloud of short passages. During this event, Beth also checked students' understanding of the story by asking questions based on the pictures in the text and by asking students to make predictions based on the

pictures. She also asked questions that required the students to relate the story to their own personal experience.

The remaining one session involved the use of other materials. During this event, Beth reviewed sentences that the students had worked with before their holiday break. This involved her writing the words on the experience chart and having the students read them along with her as she pointed to each one. In the second half of this session, Beth explained two teacher-made reading games to the group.

Middle-High Group

Of the seven middle-high group sessions, four involved the use of a basal reader and three involved the use of a trade storybook. The four lessons that involved basal readers, all involved the same level reader. One involved a discussion of the story being read, one involved a round-robin read aloud of short passages, and one session involved the students in silent reading of the story. In addition, all but one of the sessions focused on going over vocabulary words in the story that the students found difficult or ones that Beth thought they might have difficulty reading. Typically before the session Beth would ask the group members if there were any words they had difficulty reading. Two of the four lessons included a discussion of the metafunctions of print such as the meaning of a question mark.

Of the three sessions that involved the use of trade books, all but one involved reviewing vocabulary words from the story. During these sessions, the students read silently on their own. Only one session involved a round-robin read aloud of passages from the story.

Middle-Low Group

Of the eight middle-low group sessions, two involved the use of a basal reader, three involved the use of one trade storybook, and one involved the use of the Breakthrough materials.

Both of the sessions that involved the use of a basal reader consisted of a round-robin read aloud of short passages of text. One of these sessions involved a discussion of the story, and the other session involved going over vocabulary words from the story.

Of the three sessions that involved the use of trade books, two involved a round robin read aloud of passages from the text, and one session involved reading passages silently. One of these sessions also involved a discussion of the metafunctions of print (i.e., defining the meaning of a paragraph), and one session involved going over vocabulary words from the story.

The one Breakthrough activity involved the identification of words, reading aloud short sentences, and copying sentences.

From these descriptions, it is clear that students' opportunities to engage in literacy activities involving both oral and written language varied according to ability level. For the most part, meetings with the two middle groups primarily functioned to review story vocabulary. The students in these groups primarily worked independently, reading the stories silently. The high group members primarily engaged in activities that allowed them to display their knowledge of the text as well as opportunities to express their personal experiences and opinions about the stories read. The low group, in contrast, primarily engaged in skill-building activities which emphasized word identification and sentence construction. During these activities, there were few opportunities for the group members to display their knowledge verbally. Particularly notable was the lack of change in the type of materials used by the low group across the year. Stability in the curriculum experienced by ability group members was not only reinforced by the type of materials Beth assigned to each group it was also reinforced by the relatively stable membership of each group.

Changes In Group Membership Across the Year

An examination of ability group membership across the year revealed that this aspect of group organization remained relatively stable. Those students who Beth described as "Fluent Readers" in the beginning of the year

were placed in the high reading group and remained members of this group for the entire year, with three exceptions. Only one of the changes in group membership resulted in an intergroup move. In this case, one boy from the high group was moved to the middle-high group in the beginning of the year. The other two changes in membership were the result of students being transferred into or out of the class. In the beginning of the year, one boy was transferred into the class and was placed in the high reading group. In the middle of the year, another boy left the group because he relocated to another school.

Those students who Beth described as "Emergent Readers" in the beginning of the year were placed in the middle-high group and remained in this group for the entire school year. The only change that occurred involved the one boy who was placed in this group from the high group. The students who Beth described as "Readers Who Are Getting There" were placed in the middle-low group and remained in this group for the entire school year, with two exceptions. In the middle of the year, one boy from the low group was "moved up" to this group and one boy was transferred to another class.

And finally, the students who Beth described as "Nonreaders" were placed in the low group and remained in this group for the entire school year, with three exceptions. One boy was moved from this group to the

middle-low reading group, one boy was transferred to another class, and one boy who arrived in the class towards the end of the year was placed in this group.

In summary, there was relatively little change in ability group membership across the year. This finding is consistent with the existing literature on student mobility across ability levels and suggest that these ability groups functioned more like closed systems rather than instructional environments that were open to individual rates of progress (Collins, 1986; Eder, 1986).

Membership in a reading ability group was not only a defining factor in the social organization of classroom literacy events, it served to constrain the children's out-of-class literacy experiences as well. For example, in the beginning of the year, Beth created library groups that were comprised of children of mixed-ability levels. These groups made weekly visits to the school's library. After the formation of reading ability groups, however, she reconstituted the membership in the library groups to correspond to the membership of the reading ability groups. Beth explained that she reorganized the library groups so that all the children in a particular ability group would be available for instruction on a given day.

Conclusion

Based on the descriptions provided in this chapter it seems clear that students' assignment to ability groups for

reading instruction determined their learning opportunities or "points of entry into early literacy development" (Clay, 1991). This was evidenced by the different types of print materials used and the different types of reading activities engaged in by the groups.

Those students whom Beth described as "fluent readers" were placed in the high group and were treated as independent readers from their first reading session. Beth structured activities that were consistent with this perception. She enabled the high group members by giving them the choice to select the book they would all read as a group. These students consistently used trade books and had greater opportunities to focus on reading activities that were meaning oriented compared to their low group peers. Moreover, the types of activities constructed during high group reading events allowed group members to display their knowledge through talking about the books they were reading and relating the stories to their own experiences (Cochran-Smith, 1984). Lindfors (1980) and Wells (1986), among others, have referred to this as "talking to learn."

In sharp contrast, those students whom Beth described as "nonreaders" were assigned to the low group and were offered literacy experiences that emphasized the learning of language forms, such as statements and questions. The majority of their reading group sessions involved the use of the Breakthrough materials and the emphasis of instruction

was on isolated units of print that were unrelated to a larger text or meaningful task. Even when this group engaged in lessons that involved trade books, the activities focused on listening to a story being read by the teacher, choral reading, or going over sentences that were extracted from the text. Low group members had few opportunities to display their knowledge verbally and to learn through talk.

It was of interest how these different literacy learning opportunities might shape students' participation during ability group instruction. As described earlier, studies of ability-based groups have found group differences in the performance behaviors displayed. Most prominently, it has been found that low group members engage in more interrupting behaviors, and make fewer initiations compared to their high group peers. For the most part, the existing literature on ability-based reading groups in the primary grades have examined groups working with the same type of curricular materials, that is, basal readers. The type of reading activity engaged in has typically been reading aloud portions of the text in a round-robin turn-taking style. With a few exceptions, there is a dearth of research which has examined student participation in ability groups when activities or materials change. Such descriptions are necessary to better understand the impact of the learning environment on students' participation in ability-based reading events.

In the chapter that follows, the interrelations between the various instructional, social, and cognitive aspects of reading group events for high and low group members are examined. By analyzing the discourse practices that emerge within each of these groups over time is possible to see the interrelationships between features of the learning environment (e.g., materials used) and the type of talk and social interaction that is constructed. In turn, this analysis reveals how the discourse that is constructed shapes group members' participation.

CHAPTER VI

ABILITY-BASED READING GROUPS AS COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

In the previous chapter we saw that Beth differentially arranged reading opportunities for students when they were members of ability-based reading groups by varying both the type of print materials used and the type of reading activities in which the students engaged. To shed light on the type of speech event constructed within the high and low groups, an in-depth analysis of the discourse was conducted on a sample of six reading group sessions: three high and three low group reading events, one from each data collection phase. Of particular interest were the interrelationships between changes in the materials used and the activities engaged in, and any corresponding changes in the group's discourse. An analysis of each group's discourse sheds light on how the nature of the activity as a speech event shaped students' participation. By doing this I hope to shed light on some of the ability group performance differences described in the literature. The following analysis focuses upon five features of each group's discourse: 1) teacher turn-allocation procedures, 2) student interrupting behaviors, 3) student initiations, 4) teacher feedback behaviors, and 5) teacher management acts. For each of these features, patterns within ability

groups as well as across ability groups were examined across the school year.

Turn Taking

The turn-taking procedures participants use to initiate and maintain interaction is one of the basic features of any social interaction which contribute to the organization of the communicative event (Garfinkel, 1967; Ervin-Tripp, 1979; Mehan, 1979; McDermott, 1976; and Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1976, among others). Research has shown that there is both situational variation and cultural variation in the ways that turns are managed during social interaction (Au, 1980; McDermott, 1976; Philips, 1972), reflecting differences in the expectations or norms regarding turn taking during social events. How turns are managed during interaction will, in part, be shaped by the nature of the communicative event (e.g., informal conversation, classroom lesson, religious service), where it takes place, (e.g., party, classroom, church), who the participants are and their relationship to one another (i.e., roles and status), and the degree to which participation is ritualized or routinized (e.g., conversations, lessons, religious recitations). For example, the means by which turns are distributed across speakers will vary depending on whether the participants are a group of friends engaging in a conversation or a teacher and a group of students meeting in reading groups for instruction.

There is a long research tradition regarding the study of classroom discourse (See Cazden, 1986 for a good review; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Researchers of classroom language have identified a variety of features that distinguish classroom talk from other types of discourse. Traditional classroom lessons or recitations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) reflect an imbalance in the speaking rights of the participants, in that one individual, the teacher, has the right to assign or allocate turns, over the rest of the group (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979; DeStefano et al., 1982). In traditional ability-based reading group lessons, turns are often preestablished or assigned such as in the round-robin system of turn-taking that is common during read aloud activities (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This system is characterized by the teacher assigning turns prior to the beginning of the lesson. Typically the order of turn taking is structured by the seating arrangement of the students. During this activity, students take turns reading aloud from a text which is typically a basal reader. Teachers may also preassign turns to students before the start of a lesson or at various junctures within a lesson (e.g., the beginning of a new page during read-aloud activities).

In addition to the preassignment of turns, teachers may allocate turns during the face-to-face unfolding of a lesson. Mehan (1979) identified three basic procedures by

which teachers select respondents during traditional lessons: 1) **Individual nomination**, 2) **Invitation to bid**, and 3) **Invitation to reply**.

As was described in the Methods chapter, **Individual nomination** involves the teacher selecting a next speaker either by name or through some nonverbal gesture as in pointing or looking at the person. **Invitation to bid** involves the teacher selecting a next speaker by first inviting students to signal that they wish to respond. Hand raising is the most common method of bidding for the floor in most classrooms. Occasionally, however, students may also bid for the floor by "calling out" such as "I know," or by calling the teacher by name. **Invitation to reply** involves the teacher opening the floor to anyone to respond. This procedure enables students to nominate their own turns to participate as in the following open-ended teacher, "Tell me about the book." Students may reply in unison without being named or obtaining the floor by bidding. I refer to this procedure as an **Open bid**.

In addition to these teacher-controlled strategies for turn allocation, there are occasions when students find opportunities to nominate their own turn. Although it has been found that opportunities for students to select their own turns to speak or participate are rarely found in traditional lessons (Mehan, 1979).

In contrast to speaking rights characteristic of

classroom lessons, more recently, investigators of classroom discourse have examined another type of speech event that is more like natural conversation. Some have termed this form of discourse, **instructional conversation** (Goldenberg, 1993; Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). These conversations have been characterized by more symmetrical social relations, unconstrained topic flow, and more informality of style compared to the classroom recitation script (Cazden, 1988). Turns tend to be negotiated or managed locally, that is, the mechanisms governing the taking of turns operate on a turn-by-turn basis.

Another interactive feature of the classroom lesson script is the prevalent three-part sequence partitioned into categories of teacher initiation, student reply, and teacher evaluation (Mehan, 1979). This discourse structure has often been referred to as the IRE sequence or recitational structure (Cazden, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This type of interactional structure has been termed the "teacher-talk register" and is often contrasted against an interactional structure that is closer to natural conversation or discussion. According to Mehan (1979), the procedures teachers use to allocate turns is a part of every teacher initiation act, that is, each initiation act "not only specifies the action to be taken but also does the work of identifying the population of people who are to reply to

the initiation (p. 84)." The type of interactional structure reflects notions of the nature of the type of knowledge being valued as well as the process by which this knowledge is acquired. For example, teachers ask many questions to which they know the answers. These types of known-answer or test questions typically assess children's knowledge rather than assist students in developing new understandings (Cazden, 1986, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988 among others). During this type of speech event, the teacher typically controls both the development of topic (and what counts as relevant to it) and who gets a turn to talk" (Cazden, 1988, p. 30).

How the taking of turns is managed during reading group instruction reveals something about how children gain access to the floor either to respond to the teacher's elicitations or to initiate comments on their own. It was expected that the nature of the reading activity would shape the type of turn-allocation procedures Beth used to allocate turns during reading group instruction. It was also of interest what types of teacher initiations were made through these allocations of turns. For example, there is some research which suggests that during story discussion activities elicitations may be more likely to be made up of open bid turn allocation procedures (McCollum, 1989). In contrast, reading sessions that are more characteristic of classroom

recitations are more likely to be comprised of more teacher-controlled strategies such as individual nomination and invitations to bid.

The following section will examine how Beth allocated turns to students during high and low group reading activities.

Teacher Turn-Allocation Procedures

During both high and low group reading instruction, Beth allocated turns by directly nominating individual students to respond, by inviting group members to bid for a turn by signalling (e.g., raising one's hand) that they wish to respond, and by opening the floor by inviting any one to reply to her initiation. The latter procedure allowed students to select their own turns. Additionally, students nominated their own turns when they initiated comments, statements, or questions that were unsolicited by the teacher.

Although there were similarities in the ways Beth allocated turns to students across groups, there were important differences as well. Differences in the distribution of turn allocation procedure were found both across groups as well as within groups when the nature of the reading activity changed.

High Group Reading Events

Table 4 presents the distribution of the procedures Beth used to allocate turns to students during high group reading instruction across the year.

Table 4

Teacher Turn-Allocation Procedures Used During High Group Reading Events

	Ind Nom		Invit Bid		Invit Reply		Other		
Phase	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	Total
I	31	(66.0)	1	(2.1)	15	(31.9)	--	--	47
II	31	(48.4)	2	(3.1)	29	(45.3)	2	(3.1)	64
III	22	(53.7)	1	(2.4)	16	(39.0)	2	(4.9)	41
Total	84	(55.3)	4	(2.6)	60	(39.5)	4	(2.6)	152

Note. Phase I = Data sampled from the beginning of the year

Book Choice Activity; Phase II = Data sampled from the middle of the year - Story Discussion; Phase III = Data sampled from the end of the year - Story Discussion.

Examining all three data collection phases, more than half of the turns allocated by Beth during the high group reading activities were accomplished by nominating individual students to respond. This pattern was consistent across each of the reading group sessions. Another 40% of the total number of turns allocated by Beth were invitations to reply or open bids. In other words, 60 of the 152 turns

allocated to students were open to the group for a response. During the high group reading activities, Beth rarely allocated turns by inviting students to bid for the floor.

Individual nominations primarily took the form of **elicitations** (29% or 24), (e.g., "What's the title of your book?"), **directives** (17% or 14) (e.g., "Pick one of the two books to talk about."), **checks** (12% or 10) (e.g., "Did you finish your book?"), **requests for clarification** (12% or 10) (e.g., "The witch what?"), and **genuine questions** (11% or 9) (e.g., "Are you reading a book for fun right now?"). (See coding scheme for definitions of speech acts).

More than half of the elicitations (54% or 13) were **process elicitations**. This type of elicitation requires the respondent to offer his or her opinions or interpretations, (e.g., "Is it a funny book? Is it an exciting book? How would you describe the book?").

Another 38% (9) of the elicitations were in the form of **product elicitations**. This type of elicitation asks the respondent to provide a factual response such as, "Ok, tell us what the name of it is."

Open bids, the second most frequently used mechanism by which Beth allocated turns to high group members primarily took the form of **directives** (33% or 20) (e.g., "Now here's what I want you guys to do. Get whatever book you are reading right now."), **informatives** (25% or 15) (e.g., "Here's what you're composition books are for. I want us to

talk a little bit about the books that you're reading right now. And then you'll write that kind of information in your composition book and I'll tell you why."), and **elicitations** (22% or 13), (e.g., "But why did Annie want to take Helen away?"). The majority (69% or 9) of Beth's elicitations were **process elicitations**. The remaining 31% (4) were **product elicitations**.

When Beth invited students to bid for a turn, it was to solicit a volunteer to read from a text or to talk about a text. This is an interesting finding because this type of procedure has been found to be most typical of how teachers allocate turns during traditional classroom lessons (Mehan, 1979).

In addition to the above three procedures, there were four occasions when Beth initiated an exchange using an open-bid format, but rather than calling out a response, students raised their hand to bid for floor. This type of turn-allocation procedure was coded as "Other" and was treated as functionally distinct from those instances when students' nominated their own turn in response to Beth's open bid.

As indicated in Table 4, Beth increasingly used open bids to allocate turns to students from the beginning to the end of the year, while her use of the individual nomination procedure decreased across the year. Her use of the invitation to bid procedure remained relatively constant.

This shift in the way turns were allocated was marked by a shift in the nature of the reading activity in which the group engaged. More specifically, the activity shifted from a more traditional classroom lesson where the teacher engaged in an instructional monologue for much of the event to one that was more discussion-like. In the following section, the ways Beth allocated turns to students during each of the high group reading activities are examined.

Data Collection Phase I - Book Choice Activity. As indicated in Table 4, Beth primarily used two types of procedures to allocate turns to high group members during this first period of observation: individual nominations and open bids. Individual nominations, which accounted for two-thirds of the total number of turns allocated, primarily took the form of **elicitations** (36% or 11). Within this category of speech act, the majority, (64% or 7) were **process elicitations**. The remaining 36% (4) were **product elicitations**. In fact, all of the elicitations that Beth made during this activity were individual nominations. That is, when she asked an instructional question, she always selected an individual student to respond. Another 19% (6) were **checks for understanding** and 16% (5) were **directives**.

Open bids, primarily took the form of **directives** (47%) (7), **informatives** (40%) (6), and **checks for understanding** (13%) (2).

Only one of the turns allocated by Beth invited students to bid for the floor. This occurred when she solicited a volunteer to talk about a book he was in the middle of reading.

The procedures Beth used to allocate turns to group members during this session reflected the nature of the activity. Beth asked the group members to get a book they were in the middle of reading. Consequently, each student came to the group with a different book. During this session, Beth primarily dominated the floor, engaging in what may be termed a "teacher monologue" imparting information to the group. Her talk focused on the ways one may go about selecting books to read such as talking with friends about books they have read and reading book reviews.

During this reading activity, Beth's elicitations were primarily directed to one student in the group who volunteered to talk about a book he was reading. She begins the instructional phase of the lesson by asking an open-ended question to the student, "Tell me about your book." She then systematically formulates questions which she poses to the speaker. Beth's questions serve to model for the group the types of questions the students may ask others and themselves regarding a book they are reading. They can also use these questions as a guide when they go to write about their books in their reading journals. She then proceeds to ask the individual children in the group questions regarding

their interest in the book.

Data Collection Phase II - Storybook Discussion.

During this second period of observation, the members of the high group came together to talk about the book, Pony for Winter. One important feature of this reading event that distinguishes it from the one examined during the beginning of the year is that all of the students had read the text prior to coming together as a group. This allowed them to use their background knowledge (e.g., their understanding of the text) to contribute to the discussion.

During this reading activity, Beth again primarily used individual nominations and open bids for allocating turns. Compared to Phase I, however, her use of open bids increased. This resulted in a more equal use of these two turn allocation procedures. This pattern was primarily the result of her increased use of open bids to elicit information from students in the group. Of the 20 elicitations made during this activity, 60% (12) were individual nominations and 30% (6) were open bids. The remaining 2 elicitations were coded as "Other." A greater use of open bids to elicit information offers students greater control over participation in that it provides them with more opportunities to nominate their own turns compared to the use of individual nominations or invitations to bid.

During this activity, individual nominations primarily took the form of **elicitations** (39% or 12). Fifty percent (6) of these were **process elicitations**, and 33% (4) were **product elicitations**. Another 16% (5) of the these turns were **directives**, and 10% (3) were genuine questions.

Open bids primarily took the form of **informatives** (24% or 7), **checks for understanding** (24% or 7), **directives** (21% or 6), and **elicitations** (21% or 6). The majority of the elicitations (66% or 4) were **process elicitations**. The remaining 33% (2) were **product elicitations**.

Again, Beth rarely invited students to bid for the floor. Both turns that were invitations to bid were requests for a volunteer to read from the text. Additionally, both of the procedures coded as "Other" were in the form of product elicitations.

The following example illustrates how language was used to negotiate the meaning of the term "boarding." Through a process of question asking in an open-bid format Beth assesses the students' understanding and assists them in determining what they know about the story and where there may be some confusion. During this reading session, the students freely offer their understandings of the events in the story, frequently interrupting and overlapping the turns of others. Instances of simultaneous speech are indicated by the symbol]:

Teacher: All right, you're all about at the same point, but we've haven't talked about this

book yet.

Tell me about the book. Tell me about the book.

Cary : Debra finds this

Nat : She doesn't find she gets

Teacher: Would you let him talk and then you can add
what you want to add (to Nat
for interrupting Cary.)

Cary : Debra gets what she wants which is a pony.
She dreams of it and she goes to bed and then
she asks her mom and dad and she says its
free

Teacher: Well what's free?

Cary : The pony.

Teacher: They're giving away ponies for free?

Cary : There's one pony that they needed to be
boarded

Teacher: Wait, let me get this straight. Some guy is
just giving away ponies.

Cary : No.

Sara : No, but they are going to return it

Cary : Yeah

Teacher: Huh?

Sara : They're going to return it.

Teacher: You mean he's loaning these people a pony?

Cary : Yeah.

Teacher: Why?

Cary : He needs to loan them one pony because he
can't keep it for the winter.

Teacher: Why not?

Cary : I don't know.

Teacher: Is anybody clear about why he can't keep her
for the winter?

Sara : No.

Teacher: All right, well. we'll go back to that.

After this discussion, Beth opens the floor to the children to bid for a reading turn. Several children are nominated to read the portions of the story that pertain to the boarding of the pony. The following interaction occurred after the students completed their reading turns:

Teacher: So what he's saying is, in the winter we board them out. That doesn't mean they take boards and cover them up with boards. It means that

Cary : That they give them away for the winter, people borrow them for the winter, and take care of them for the winter.

Teacher: They take care of them, they feed them, they keep them warm in their barns, they exercise them and this man doesn't have to pay to feed them. These people pay to feed them and they also get to keep them for the winter time.

Through a group discussion, followed by a reading of the text, Cary is able to articulate his understanding of the term, boarding. Through interactions such as these, the high group members are able to display their knowledge verbally and to use language as a tool for the negotiation of meaning (Genishi, 1987; Wells, 1986).

Data Collection Phase III - Storybook Discussion.

During this third period of observation, Beth and the high group members met to talk about another trade book they were in the middle of reading, Helen Keller. Similar to the reading activity examined in Phase II, the type of speech event that was constructed during this event was more like a discussion than a traditional lesson. During this event

Beth continued to use individual nominations and open bids to allocate turns, but compared to the procedures used during the Phase II activity, her use of open bids increased.

During this reading activity, individual nominations primarily took the form of **reinitiations** (23% or 5), **requests for clarification** (18% or 4), **directives** (18% or 4), and **genuine questions** (14% or 3). Only one of these turns was in the form of an **elicitation**.

Open bids primarily took the form of **directives** (44% or 7) and **elicitations** (44% or 7). The majority the **elicitations** (71% or 5) **process elicitations**. The remaining 29% (2) were **product elicitations**. **Informatives** accounted for 13% (2) of the remaining turns.

There is a clear shift here with regard to the type of speech acts Beth initiated during this reading group activity. Particularly worth mentioning was the change in the way Beth allocated turns to students during elicitation interchanges from the beginning of the year. Of the 10 **elicitations** Beth made during this event, 70% (7) were in the open-bid format. Individual nominations accounted for only 10% (1) of the **elicitations**. The remaining 20% (2) were coded as "Other." This pattern represents a reversal in the way Beth elicited information from students from the beginning of the year. In the beginning of the year all of Beth's **elicitations** were individual nominations. By the end

of the year, the majority of her elicitations were in the open-bid format.

During this reading activity, Beth begins the instructional phase of the lesson by reviewing some of the events that occurred in the chapter the students had previously read. She then asks an open-ended question regarding the students' understanding of the chapter. During this session, the students again freely offer their understandings of the events in the story:

Teacher: Now, you just finished reading a chapter called, "The worst fight of all." And in that worst fight Annie Sullivan (pauses)

Sara : Had a fight with Helen.

Teacher: Had a big fight with Helen cause Helen had such terrible manners that Annie couldn't stand it.

Nat : Her tables manners were a pig.

Teacher: Yeah. Now, does it seem to you like Annie is going to teach Helen anything? If that was the last chapter you had read, I mean doesn't it seem like Helen hates Annie?

Sara : Yeah, because she wanted her mother.

Teacher: She wanted her mother. She wanted her mother who would let her do all those things that Annie wouldn't let her do.

Sara : Helen didn't want to learn all those things, she wanted to play.

Teacher: Alright. But then in the beginning of the chapter, W-A-T-E-R, it begins, Miss Kate, I want to take Helen away with me. (Beth reads and points to the words on the page of the book.)

But why did Annie want to take Helen away?

Sara : Because

Cary : She (inaudible) mother.

Teacher: (inaudible) mother. Anything else? (looking at Sara)

Sara : I know, cause any time when Annie Sullivan would pull on her hand and pull away, Miss Kate would say let her go, and she didn't like her saying that and so if she went away

she wouldn't be able to do that.
Teacher: That's right.

Summary

These findings indicate that Beth used a combination of a more teacher-controlled turn allocation procedure (individual nomination) and a more student-controlled procedure (invitation to reply or open bids) to allocate turns during high group reading activities. Moreover, the nature of the reading activity both created and was constituted by changes in the ways turns were allocated by Beth. Changes in the reading activity with regard to the purpose of the task, (e.g., one group member talking about a text that only he has read versus a group discussion about a "shared" text) resulted in shifts in the distribution of the procedures Beth used to allocate turns. During the first session, the children were directed to get a book they were in the middle of reading. None of the members in the reading group shared the "same" knowledge of the story being talked about. So it was less likely that Beth would be able to use an invitation to reply procedure with regard to talking about any one book. Beth more frequently used open bids when all the children had some "shared" reading of the text.

These patterns also indicate that Beth increasingly elicited responses from high group members using the invitation to reply procedure. The majority of her elicitations were process elicitations and encouraged

students to offer their opinions and ideas about a particular topic. It is believed that these process elicitations initiated within an open-bid format created opportunities for high group members to select their own turns and offer their contributions to the ongoing discussions.

The turn allocation procedures Beth used with the high group stands in sharp contrast to the ways she allocated turns to students during low group reading instruction. I turn now to the way Beth allocated turns to students during low group reading events.

Low Group Reading Events

Table 5 presents the distribution of the procedures Beth used to allocate turns during low group reading activities across the year.

Table 5

Teacher Turn-Allocation Procedures Used During Low Group

Reading Events

	Ind Nom		Invit Bid		Invit Reply		Other		
Phase	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	<u>n</u>	(%)	Tot
I	69	(54.3)	16	(12.5)	40	(31.5)	2	(1.6)	127
II	41	(53.2)	9	(11.7)	24	(31.2)	3	(3.9)	77
III	1	(4.2)	--	--	23	(95.8)	-	-	24
Total	111	(48.7)	25	(11.0)	87	(38.1)	5	(2.2)	228

Note. Phase I = Data sampled from the beginning of the year

Breakthrough Activity; Phase II = Data sampled from the middle of the year-Basal Read-Aloud Activity; Phase III = Data sampled from the end of the year - Storybook Reading.

Examining all three data collection phases, Beth primarily used individual nominations and open bids to allocate turns. However, compared to the high group sessions, Beth more frequently used the invitation to bid procedure with the low group sessions.

Individual nominations primarily took the form of **directives** (31% or 34), **reinitiations** (20% or 22), and **elicitations** (18% or 20). Almost two-thirds (65% or 13) of these were **product elicitations**. Another 20% (4) were **choice elicitations**. Only 10% (2) were in the form of **process elicitations**, and 5% (1) was a **metaprocess elicitation**.

Open bids primarily took the form of **informatives** (37% or 32), **directives** (29% or 25), and **elicitations** (16% or 14). The majority (71% or 10) of the elicitations were **product elicitations**, 21% (3) were **process elicitations**, and 7% (1) were **choice elicitations**.

Invitations to bid primarily took the form of **elicitations** (56% or 14). The majority of these (86% or 12) were in the category of **product elicitation**. The remaining 14% (2) were **process elicitations**.

Another 36% (9) of the invitation to bids involved the assignment of turns to students to read aloud from their basal reader. Another 8% (2) were **reinitiations**. The remaining 4 invitations to bid were coded as "Other." The majority of these took the form of **product elicitations**.

In general, in comparison to the high group sessions, Beth more frequently used the invitation to bid procedure when asking instructional questions during low group sessions. In addition, she made fewer elicitations during low group reading activities and the majority of these were product elicitations, that is requiring a specific answer which the teacher had in mind such as a name, or a word. In contrast, Beth rarely used the invitation to bid procedure for elicitations during high group activities. Additionally, the majority of the high group elicitations were process elicitations, thus requiring students to express their opinions or ideas about a topic more frequently.

Examining all of the low group lessons combined, however, masks some of the variation related to the interrelations between the nature of the reading activity and the type of turn-taking structures employed. In the following section, the ways Beth allocated turns to students during each of the low group reading activities are examined.

Data Collection Phase I- Breakthrough Activity. During this first observation period, the members of the low group were engaged in a Breakthrough activity that was comprised of word identification and sentence construction tasks. During this session Beth used all three turn allocation procedures.

Of the three procedures, Beth most frequently used individual nominations to allocate turns during low group reading sessions. These primarily took the form of **directives** (32% or 22), **elicitations** (28% or 19), and **reinitiations** (22% or 15). The majority (68% or 13) of the elicitations were in the category of **product elicitation**. Another 21% were **choice elicitations**. There was only one **process elicitation** and one **metaprocess elicitation**.

Open bids, the second most frequently used procedure to allocate turns, primarily took the form of **informatives** (48% or 19). Another 18% (7) were **directives**. Only 11% or 4 of the open bids were **elicitations**. All of these were **product elicitations**.

Invitations to bid, which accounted for the fewest number of allocated turns, primarily took the form of **product elicitations** (75% or 12). The remaining 13% (2) were **reinitiations** and another 13% (2) were **requests to read**.

The remaining 2 teacher initiations were coded as "Other." These were in the speech act category of **product elicitations**.

Examining only elicitations, of the 37 elicitations initiated by Beth, 51% (19) were individual nominations and 32% (12) were invitations to bid. Only 11% (4) were open bids. The remaining 5% (2) elicitations were coded as "Other." The majority of the elicitations were in the form

of product elicitations. This type of elicitation typically occurred in the context of the arrangement of word cards in a sentence and required a nonverbal response such as "Can you change it to read, She will go to school?" In fact, during this activity, the majority of Beth's elicitations required a nonverbal response from the children, fostering few opportunities for the students to use their oral language skills.

In summary, during this Breakthrough activity, Beth primarily used individual nominations and invitations to bid to elicit a response from the group members. When she used open bids it was primarily to inform the group or to direct group behavior.

Data Collection Phase II- Basal Read-Aloud Activity.

During this second phase of data collection, the members of the low group were observed reading the first story, Bears, in the first level of the basal reader series used in the class. This activity consisted of children taking turns reading small units of print from their text through a preassigned turn-taking system. As was the case with the Breakthrough activity, Beth primarily used individual nominations and open bids to allocate turns to students. In fact the distribution of turn-allocation procedures is very similar to that found during the Breakthrough activity.

During this reading activity, more than half of the turns Beth allocated to students were individual nominations. These turns primarily took the form of **genuine questions** (32% or 13), **directives** (27% or 11), **requests to read short sentences from the text** (20% or 8), and **reinitiations** (17% or 7). Only one turn was in the form of an **elicitation**, categorized as a **product elicitation**.

Open bids, the second most frequently used turn allocation procedure, primarily took the form of **directives** (50% or 12). Only 17% (4) were in the form of **elicitations**. The majority (75% or 3) of these were **process elicitations** and the remaining 25% (1) were **choice elicitations**.

Another 17% (4) were **informatives**, 8% (2) were requests to read, and 4% (1) were checks for understanding.

Invitations to bid accounted for 12% (9) of the total number of turns allocated to students. The majority (78% or 7) of these occurred in the context of requesting volunteers to read from the text. Of the remaining two turns allocated, 22% (2) were **process elicitations**.

Of the three turns coded as "Other," 67% (2) were **elicitations**, (one **product** and one **process**), and the remaining one was a **request to read**.

Examining elicitations separately, of the 9 elicitations made, 44% (4) were open bids, 22% (2) were invitations to bid, and 22% (2) were coded as "Other." The majority of these elicitations were in the category of

product elicitation. Compared to the Breakthrough activity, a greater percentage of the elicitations that were made during this activity were process elicitations and required a verbal response.

Data Collection Phase III- Storybook Reading Activity.

During this third period of observation, the low group met on the rug to listen to Beth read aloud the story, Are you my mother? (Eastman, 1960). All but one of the turns allocated by Beth during this event were in the open bid format. Of these turns, 39% (9) were **informatives**, 26% (6) were **directives**, and another 26% (6) were **elicitations**. All of the elicitations were in the form of **product elicitations**. The remaining 9% (2) of these turns were **reinitiations**.

The remaining one individual nomination took the form of a **directive**. Although Beth allocated fewer turns to students during this reading event compared to the first two reading activities, a greater percentage of these turns took the form of elicitations. Moreover, compared to the other two low group sessions, all of the elicitations were in the open bid format, that is, inviting anyone to respond.

Summary

These findings indicate that Beth primarily used individual nominations and open bids to allocate turns during low group reading events. When we examine each of the different reading activities separately, we find that

the way Beth allocated turns to students were similar during the Breakthrough and the basal read aloud activities. The type of turn allocation procedures Beth used during these reading events offered few opportunities for students to nominate their own turns. It was only during the storybook reading activity that the majority of the turns Beth allocated to students were in the open-bid format.

Based on recent research on instructional conversations, (e.g., Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) it is expected that reading activities that are more like instructional conversations or discussions with regard to encouraging students to select their own turns (i.e., open-bid procedures) are more likely to facilitate student participation than activities that are comprised of more teacher-controlled turn-allocation strategies (teacher-controlled (i.e., individual nomination and invitation to bid procedures). Although it is expected that any given classroom speech event will be comprised of discourse features that reflect both types of structuring mechanisms, they are likely to vary in degree.

In the following sections two features of student participation will be examined in relation to the reading activities engaged in. These are: 1) student interrupting behaviors, and 2) student initiations. These analyses will shed light on the interrelations between the ways in which turns are allocated and students' participation in the

group's activities.

Student Interrupting Behaviors: The Timing of Students' Turns

During traditional classroom lessons, teachers not only control how turns are allocated, they also control the timing of students' participation, that is when students gain access to the floor. In the context of ability-based reading group instruction, breaches in the norms for the timing of participation have typically been termed turn violations (Borko & Eisenhart, 1989; Collins, 1987; Eder 1982). The majority of this research has examined ability groups engaged in reading activities that involve reading aloud from a basal text. The findings have shown that low group members interrupt more frequently than their high group peers. These interrupting behaviors have typically been interpreted as negative behavior in that violations of another student's reading turn is typically discouraged by the teacher. Rarely has the phenomenon of interruptions been examined within the context of a discussion or instructional conversation during classroom instruction. Again, this is primarily the result of the fact that this type of speech event rarely found in classrooms.

One of the key discourse features of an instructional conversation or discussion is that students nominate their own turns, the teacher frequently opens the floor up for anyone to respond. By doing this she maintains less rigid

control of turn-taking compared to the procedures most commonly found during classroom lessons. In the primary grades, as students are becoming familiar with the interactive routines of reading group instruction, it may be more likely that we find more instances of simultaneous or overlapping speech, particularly during classroom discussions or conversations, or during those turns when the floor is open to the entire group. Additionally, there may be more overlaps in students' speaking turns because they are encouraged to respond without raising their hand.

Findings from a recent study on literature discussion groups may shed light on this (Wollman-Bonilla, 1991). In her study of sixth grade literature discussion groups, Wollman-Bonilla (1991) found that not all interrupting behaviors functioned in the same way. She also found that the high group members engaged in more turn violations and inadvertent overlaps compared to their low group peers.

Based on these findings, we may ask what are the norms for the allocation of turns and how is this related to the type of student interrupting behaviors observed? It was expected that in reading activities in which open bids are more frequently used, there would be a higher frequency of overlapping speech and turn violations than in those cases of group instruction that are structured more like traditional lessons. In the following section, the six reading group transcripts are examined for instances of

students' interrupting behaviors. This inductive analysis reveals three types of interrupting behaviors. Each is described in turn.

There were instances when a student had the floor and a second speaker interrupted another person for the purpose of displaying his or her knowledge. This typically occurred before the first speaker completed his or her turn. This type of interruption has been most commonly discussed in the literature. I labelled this behavior, **Turn violation**.

The following illustration of a turn violation is taken from the high group reading event that was sampled from the middle of the year, when the group was talking about the book, Pony for Winter. This interruption occurs in the context of an elicitation initiated in an open-bid format.

Teacher: All right. You're all about at the same point, but we haven't talked about this book yet. Tell me about the book. Tell me about the book.

Cary : Debra finds this

Nat :] She doesn't find she gets

Teacher:] Would you let him talk and then you can add what you want to add.

Cary : Debra gets what she wants which is a pony. She dreams of it and she goes to bed and then she asks her mom and dad and she says its free.

In the above case, Cary who nominates his own turn is interrupted by Nat before completing his response. Beth, in turn, reprimands Nat. This allows Cary to finish his turn. Nat does not get the floor in the next turn.

A second type of interruption that was identified was labelled, **Insertion**. Two types of Insertions were identified in the data. **Type I Insertion** were Requests for clarification. These were requests for the speaker to repeat his or her turn. **Type II Insertion** were Assistance behaviors. These were attempts by one of the students to assist or help another student who had the floor. Both types of behaviors typically occurred before the nominated student responded.

The following two excerpts illustrate the two types of Insertions. Both of these occurred during the low group reading event sampled from the middle of the year when they were engaged in a Basal Read-Aloud activity.

Type I Insertion

Teacher: Everybody follow along with your finger so
that Mara and Michelle/
Jack: What about the red bird?
Teacher: The red bird doesn't talk on this page.

Type II Insertion

Teacher: And then Michelle, what does the yellow bird
say?
Mark: (points to the text to show Michelle where to
begin)
Teacher: She can do it. (to Mark)

A third type of interrupting behavior identified involved students speaking simultaneously. This type of interruption behavior was labelled, **Overlap**. The following example was taken from the high group reading event that was sampled from the middle of the year.

Teacher: So what he's saying is, in the winter we board them out. That doesn't mean they take boards and cover them up with boards. It means that

]

Cary : that they give them away for the winter, people borrow them for the winter, and take care of them for the winter.

Teacher: They take care of them, they feed them, they keep them warm in their barns, they exercise them and this man doesn't have to pay to feed them. These people pay to feed them and they also get to keep them for the winter time.

Those interrupting behaviors that did not fall into one of the above three categories were coded as **Other**. This type of interrupting behavior occurred infrequently.

The number of interrupting behaviors made by high and low group members across the year is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

The Number of Interruptions Made by High and Low Group Members Across the Year

Group	Phase			Total
	I	II	III	
	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>
High	1	5	14	20
Low	9	4	1	14

Note. The values represent the number of instances

observed. High Group, Phase I = Book Choice Activity;

Phase II = Story Discussion; Phase III = Story Discussion.

Low Group, Phase I = Breakthrough Activity;

Phase II = Basal Read-Aloud Activity; Phase III = Storybook Reading Activity.

As indicated in the table, the high group members interrupting behaviors increased from the beginning to the end of the year. That is, as the high group reading activities became more open with regard to the way Beth allocated turns, the group members interrupted more frequently. In contrast, the low group members made fewer interruptions as the school year progressed. Additionally, the high group members engaged in more interrupting behaviors compared to their low group peers.

High Group Reading Events

Examining all three high group reading activities across the year, of the 20 interruption behaviors initiated by students, turn violations accounted for 35% (7) and overlapping speech accounted for 35% (7). All but two of the turn violations occurred in the context of an individual nomination. The reverse pattern was observed with overlaps, with all but two of these occurring in the context of an open bid turn allocation procedure.

Insertions accounted for 25% (5) of the high group members' interrupting behaviors. All but one of these were Requests for clarification. The majority of these occurred in the context of individual nominations. The remaining one involved one student offering assistance to another student in the group. This also occurred in the context of an individual nomination. The remaining 5% (1) were coded as other.

Eleven of the 20 (55%) interrupting behaviors made by high group members interrupted other students. The remaining 9 (45%) interrupting behaviors interrupted Beth.

Examining each of the high group reading events separately, in the beginning of the year when one student was asked to talk about the book he was reading, one interruption was made. This was coded as a turn violation and occurred during the opening of the reading activity when Beth was asking each of the group members to get a book they were in the middle of reading.

In the middle of the year, when the group met to talk about the story they were reading, three of the five interruptions were coded as instances of overlapping speech. All three of the overlaps occurred in the context of an open bid turn allocation procedure. Two of these interrupted Beth's turn and one interrupted another student's turn.

Of the remaining two interruptions, one was coded as a turn violation and the other was coded as Other. Both of these interrupted another student's turn.

Towards the end of the year, students' interrupting behaviors increased to a total of 14. Five of these interruptions were coded as turn violations. Three of these interrupted Beth's turn and one interrupted another student's turns. Another four of the students' interruptions were coded as Overlaps. Two overlapped another student's turn and one overlapped Beth's turn.

Another four of the student interruptions were Type I Insertions, requesting clarification, (3 were directed to a student and 1 was directed to Beth). The remaining one was a Type II Insertion, consisting of one student offering assistance to another group member.

Across the year, eight of the high group members' interruptions were acknowledged by Beth. Six of these were overlaps and two were turn violations. Another six of the interruptions received responses from Beth. The majority (4) of these interruptions were requests for clarification. Of the remaining two, one was a turn violation and one was an overlap. Only two of the interruptions received reprimands from Beth. Both of these were turn violations. Another two were interrupted by Beth. The remaining two interrupting behaviors were ignored by Beth. One of these was a Insertion - in the form of assistance, and one was coded as Other.

Thus, of the 20 interruptions made by high group members, the majority (70% or 14) received at least a minimal positive response from Beth (i.e., acknowledgments or responses).

Low Group Reading Events

Of the 14 interruptions made by low group members across the year, turn violations accounted for 50% (7). All but one of these occurred when the floor had been nominated to an individual speaker. Insertions accounted for 29% (4)

of the interruptions. Half of these were requests for clarification directed to Beth and half were students' offers of assistance to other students. All but one of the insertions occurred in the context of an individual nomination. The remaining one occurred during an open-bid procedure.

Instances of overlapping speech accounted for only 14% (2) of the interruptions. Both of these occurred during an open-bid turn-taking procedure. The remaining one interruption was coded as Other.

The majority (79% or 11) of the low group members interruptions interrupted other student members' turns. The remaining (21% or 3) interrupted Beth's turns.

Examining each of the low group reading activities separately, in the beginning of the year, when the low group members were engaged in a Breakthrough activity, 44% (4) of the interrupting behaviors were turn violations. All but one interrupted another student's turn.

Only 22% (2) of the interruptions were overlaps. One of these overlapped another student's turn and one overlapped Beth's turn. Another 22% (2) were insertions. One was a request for clarification directed to Beth and one was a student assisting another member of the group. The remaining one interruption was coded as Other.

In the middle of the year, when the low group was engaged in a basal read aloud activity, half of the

students' interrupting behaviors were turn violations and interrupted another student's turn. The remaining half (2) were insertions. One was a request for clarification and one was one student assisting another who had the floor.

Towards the end of the year, when the low group was engaged in a storybook reading activity with Beth one interruption was made by a student. This was coded as a turn violation.

Teacher: Alright. This box is really, you guys can use any of the books on the book cases. They're all available. But the books in this box are books that the pictures and the words go together easily, if you really try you can read a lot of words in these books. You probably can't read all of them

Alex:]
I can.

Teacher: You probably can't read all of them, but you can read most of them or a lot of them and you can use the picture to help you tell the story.

Examining the low group members' interrupting behaviors across all three reading group events, 36% (5) received reprimands and 36% (5) received responses. Only 14% (2) were acknowledged and another 14% (2) were ignored.

Of the seven turn violations that were made, two were reprimanded, three received responses, and two were ignored. Both requests for clarification received responses from Beth. Of the two overlaps, one received a response and one was acknowledged. Both of the insertions in the form of assisting behaviors were reprimanded. This pattern of

teacher feedback to students' interrupting behaviors stands in contrast to the pattern revealed during the high group's reading sessions. This could be because Beth wanted each student in the low group to display his or her knowledge by completing his or her turn on their own.

Thus, of the 14 interruptions made by the low group members, 50% (7) received a minimal response from Beth. The remaining 50% were either reprimanded or ignored.

Summary

Members of the high group more frequently engaged in inadvertent overlaps of speech with other group members or Beth compared to their low group peers. These most often occurred in the context of an invitation to reply or open bid turn-taking structure. The high group members' turn violations most frequently occurred in the context of an individual nomination procedure. In contrast, the low group members made more turn violations than their high group peers. The majority of their turn violations occurred in the context of an invitation to bid or individual nomination turn-allocation procedure.

These findings confirm my initial expectations that there would be more instances of overlapping speech during high group sessions because their reading sessions were constituted by a more open turn-taking structure which opens the floor for anyone to reply. In addition, high group members' overlaps were frequently acknowledged by Beth.

In the high group reading sessions students seemed to feel free to offer their opinions or ideas even if this meant interrupting other group members. The majority of the reading activities that the high ability group engaged in was story discussion. This type of speech event consisted of a less rigid turn-taking structure compared to the speech events that were constructed during the Breakthrough and basal reading activities with the low group members which were more like traditional lessons.

The analysis of how turns were allocated during high and low reading activities reveals that each group's discourse context shaped both the amount and type of interrupting behaviors initiated by students. The following section considers the impact of this context on the voluntary initiations made by group members.

Student Initiations

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the three-part IRE sequence that is characteristic of traditional classroom lessons provides little opportunity for students to initiate exchanges that are unsolicited by the teacher (Cazden, 1986; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). In spite of this, there are times during reading group activities when students manage to gain access to the floor by initiating comments or asking questions that are unsolicited by either the teacher or other group members.

This section examines the frequency and content of students' initiations made within and across the high and low groups. Student initiations are defined as any unsolicited comment, statement, question, or nonverbal act that is offered voluntarily by a student(s) and is not simply a response to a previous act. It is expected that reading activities that encourage students to talk more freely without always being nominated by the teacher, such as story discussions, are more likely to encourage student initiations than activities that require children to participate only when nominated by the teacher. It is likely that the nature of the materials used during reading group instruction also play a role in the frequency of initiations as well as the type of student initiations made. Stories that may be related to students' own experiences are more likely to facilitate student initiating compared to materials that are comprised of isolated words.

Table 7 presents the number of high and low group members' initiations during reading group events across the year.

Table 7

The Number of Initiations Made By High and Low Group Members
Across the Year

Group	Phase			Total
	I	II	III	
	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>
High	10	17	22	49
Low	9	9	17	35

Note. The values represent the number of instances observed. High Group, Phase I = Book Choice Activity; Phase II = Story Discussion; Phase III = Story Discussion. Low Group, Phase I = Breakthrough Activity; Phase II = Basal Read-Aloud Activity; Phase III = Storybook Reading Activity.

Comparing across ability groups in Table 7, high group members made more voluntary initiations than their low group peers. Moreover, the number of initiations made by high group members increased steadily across the year, while those made by the low group members remained constant from the beginning to the middle of the year. Towards the end of the year, however, when the low group members were listening to Beth read a story, their initiations increased dramatically.

As previously described in the chapter on Methods, students' initiations were coded into the following categories: 1) **Metatextual** content, defined as initiations that focus on the metafunctions of print such as pointing

out the beginning of a paragraph, 2) **Textual** content, defined as focusing on the content of the story or text form, 3) **Personal** content, defined as comments or statements regarding personal feelings about the text, 4) **Procedural** content, defined as initiations that focused on the procedural aspects of the task such as a student indicating the page number from which he is reading, and 5) **Inappropriate Behavior**, such as "tapping" another student.

High Group Reading Events

Examining each of the high group reading sessions separately, in the beginning of the year each of the students was asked to get a book they were in the middle of reading. Much of Beth's instructional talk focused on the introduction of the students' reading journals and the procedures of the activity of having them write to her about the books they read. One student was selected to talk about his book.

Of the total number of student initiations made, nine were codable. The majority (78% or 7) focused on the procedural aspects of the task. All but one of these were genuine questions regarding the task such as "Beth, should we do it one at a time," referring to writing about the books they were reading. The remaining one was a comment, "But then you'll have to date stamp it every single day," referring again to the procedures of writing about their books in their reading journals. All but one of these

initiations received a response from Beth. The remaining one initiation was ignored by Beth. This one occurred prior to the opening of the reading activity during the transition phase when Beth was busy assembling the group members for their reading group and managing the other children in the class.

Of the remaining two initiations, one focused on the textual content of the activity and one was a statement expressing personal desires regarding the next activity. The comment related to the text was talk about what was going on in the picture. Beth acknowledged this contribution. Personal desires regarding the next activity (e.g., "I don't want to go to the library") occurred during the closing of the lesson. This initiation was ignored by Beth. The few student initiations that occur during the opening or closings were ignored by Beth.

In the middle of the year, when the high group met to talk about their book, the students' initiations increased to 17. In addition to a greater frequency of initiating, there was also a shift in the content of their initiations in comparison to their first reading session.

Of the 17 initiations made by the students, 15 were codable. Fifty-nine percent (10) of the initiations made connections between the story and their own personal experiences. These occurred in the context of a discussion relating the students' personal experiences of owning pets

to the experience of the female character in the story they were reading (e.g., "Two of my fish died", "My hamster was trying to get out of the cage and we had a can on top of the cage (inaudible)"). All of the students participated in this discussion sharing their experiences and related them to the text.

Of the remaining five student initiations, two focused on the textual content of the story. These initiations consisted of one student's retelling of story events as the group discussed the book.

Another two initiations focused on metatextual content. For example, when Beth was introducing the concept of a paragraph, one of the students in the group freely pointed out an instance of the beginning of a paragraph in the text ("Like when it says, Debra hold on"). All four of these received acknowledgements by Beth.

The remaining one initiation focused on the procedural aspects of the task. This was in the form of a question ("Where should I start?") addressed to Beth regarding where to begin reading. Beth responded to this question.

Towards the end of the year, during their story discussion, students' initiations increased to 22. All but one of these were codable. The majority of these (13) focused on textual content (e.g., "Helen didn't want to learn all those things she wanted to play" and "And they didn't have electricity you know why, because they didn't

have enough money").

The remaining eight initiations focused on procedural aspects of the task (e.g., "Wait I can't hear him" and "I'm on thirty-nine").

Of the total 49 student initiations made during high group reading events, more than half (59% or 29) received at least a minimal response from Beth. These included positive feedback, responses to students' questions, and corrections to students' comments regarding events or characters in the text being discussed. Beth ignored 20% (10) of the initiations and interrupted 16% (8) of the students' initiations. Beth rarely reprimanded students initiations (4% or 2).

Low Group Reading Events

In the beginning of the year, when the low group members were working with the Breakthrough materials, low group members initiated talk only 9 times. This number of initiations is small in comparison to the total number (142) of student turns during the lesson.

Of the nine initiations, three (33%) focused on the procedural aspects of the task, (e.g., "He didn't raise his hand. He has to raise his hand" and "Well you can't go past the line").

Two (22%) focused on textual content (i.e., "That says go" and "A witch"), and two (22%) consisted of inappropriate behavior (i.e., tapping another child). The remaining one

initiation focused on one student's personal opinion about the activity.

In the middle of the year when the low group members were engaged in the Basal Read-Aloud activity, the low group members made nine initiations. Six focused on the procedural aspects of the task (e.g., "What about the red bird?").

Two focused on the textual content of the lesson (e.g., "They can fly up and down" and "I will go"). The remaining one student initiation focused on personal content (i.e., "I was sad too") and occurred in the context of talk relating the text to their own personal experience about moving to a new home.

Towards the end of the year, when the low group was engaged in a Storybook Reading activity, students' initiations increased from the beginning of the year to 17. Of these 17 initiations, 12 focused on textual content such as "It has a he and a she" when Beth read, "and away she went, and away he went."

Two focused on personal content (i.e., "I like the baby bird" and "I like the picture where he's playing around (inaudible)"). Two focused on procedural content (e.g., "Can I read, The Spooky Old Tree?"). The remaining student initiation consisted of inappropriate behavior. Two students were tugging at a box of books.

During the low group reading events, the majority of their initiations (60%) (21) received at least a minimal response from Beth. These included acknowledgements and responses to students' questions. Another 17% were reprimanded, 14% were ignored, 11% were responded to and 9% were interrupted.

This large increase in the number of initiations made at the end of the year may be due to a number of factors. Beth primarily used an open-bid turn taking structure during this activity. Moreover, all of her elicitations were in the form of open bids. The storybook reading activity was more interesting to the students and the text provided repetitive segments with predictable parts in which the children could participate. One might argue that this type of interactive structure served as scaffolding for the children and allowed them to participate more fully in the reading activity.

Summary

Group differences in the number and type of initiations made by reading group members were found. For the high group members, the majority of their initiations focused on asking questions or making statements about the task and recalling their understanding of the story they read. Other initiations focused on sharing real-life experiences related to the text and on the display of knowledge of the metafunctions of print.

For the low group members, the content of their initiations varied as a function of the type of reading activity they engaged in. In the beginning of the year when they used the Breakthrough materials, the majority of their initiations focused on asking questions or making comments about the task and on inappropriate behavior.

In the middle of the year, the members of the low group made initiations that focused on asking questions and making statements about the task, using pictures to display understanding, commenting on the pictures, and reading short sentences of three words in length.

At the end of the year, the reading lesson involved the teacher reading a storybook to the group. The children participated and occasionally engaged in choral reading. The majority of the initiations that were made during this lesson focused on reading short sentences of one-to-four-words in length, using pictures to display understanding, commenting on the pictures in the book, choral reading, asking questions and commenting on the task, pointing out connections between print within the text, and pointing out connections between the pictures.

One may ask if these group patterns of child initiations made across the year reveal something about the underlying communicative competence of the groups' members or if these patterns reveal something about the constitutive nature of the activity structure that may be fostering or

constraining participation. Eder (1982) in her study of first-grade reading groups, found that the high group members were more capable of gaining access to the floor as evidenced by their greater number of initiations in the beginning of the year compared to their low group peers. While she mentioned that the high group had more opportunities to engage in discussion-oriented activities than the other groups, she did not follow up on this as a salient feature of the communicative context and as a possible explanation for why the high readers made more initiations than the low group members.

Others have addressed the relation between the nature of the activity and the type of discourse constructed. DeStefano et al. (1982) found that the teacher they observed used more directives to control the flow of activity with the low group. They attributed this finding to the fact that this group primarily worked with worksheets and flashcards. That is, the nature of the curricular materials was related to the type of discourse constructed.

These results are consistent with the differences in the ways Beth allocated turns to students across groups and within groups across activities. During the high group activities, her allocation of turns was more open, and the type of elicitations she used, process elicitations, encouraged more talk.

In sharp contrast, the discourse constructed during low group reading activities was one that was more teacher-controlled. Moreover, the majority of the elicitations were in the product and choice forms, which did not encourage lengthy responses. When the activity changed to one of storybook reading, however, the turn taking structure was more open.

Given the higher frequency of initiations, turn violations and overlapping speech during high group reading activities compared to low group sessions, it might be expected that Beth managed the high group's behavior more frequently. This will be addressed in the following section.

Teacher Management Acts

Managing children's behavior during classroom instruction is one of the primary responsibilities of teaching at any grade, but perhaps more so in the early grades when children are first becoming familiar with the general norms and routines of the classroom and going to school in general. Although all teachers manage students' behaviors and the activities of the day, different classroom arrangements require different types of management. Meeting with the entire class as a group, for example, places particular demands on the teacher's management skills in that she must deal with a large group of children encompassing a wide range of experiences and knowledge.

Similarly, when engaging in the teaching of a small group of students, the teacher must manage the flow of the lesson while periodically managing the other students in the class who are working independently. She must also manage disruptions in the lesson that occur when children enter the group from the outside to ask for assistance. Although teacher management acts are part of the social life of most classroom instruction, they also influence the cognitive aspects of instructional interchanges by functioning as temporary interruptions in the instructional flow of the lesson.

Each reading group session was examined to determine the relationship between specific types of reading activities and the incidence of teacher management acts. Teacher Management Acts directed to the group, were defined as verbal or nonverbal attempts by the teacher to keep or recall group members' attention to the task at hand.

Additionally, the timing of the management act was examined for whether or not it occurred in the middle of an exchange or at the boundary or juncture of an exchange. It was believed that those management acts that occurred in the middle of an exchange would be more disruptive to the cognitive flow of the instructional discourse than those occurring at the juncture or boundary of an exchange.

The frequency of management acts made by Beth during high and low group reading instruction is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

The Number of Teacher Management Acts During High And Low Group Reading Events

	Phase			
	I	II	III	Total
Group	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>
High	9	10	4	23
Low	45	14	6	65

Note. The values represent the number of instances observed. High Group, Phase I = Book Choice Activity; Phase II = Story Discussion; Phase III = Story Discussion. Low Group, Phase I = Breakthrough Activity; Phase II = Basal Read-Aloud Activity; Phase III = Storybook Reading Activity.

As indicated in the table, Beth initiated fewer management acts during the high group reading sessions as compared to the low group sessions. In fact, only 10% of all the turns taken by Beth served explicitly to manage the group members' behavior. Moreover, these acts decreased across the year. The majority (65%) of these were directed to individual members in the group. The remaining 35% served to manage the behavior of the entire group. The majority of the management acts were in the category of speech act of directive (61%) or 14 acts.

The majority of Beth's management acts during high group sessions served to manage students' physical behavior (52%), such as sitting appropriately, or raising their hands. The remaining management acts took the form of teacher evaluations, (22% or 5 acts) and checking for students' attention (7% or 2 acts).

Sometimes Beth's management acts were made as a result of the verbal behavior of the students, as in the cases of call outs, some interruptions, or initiations at what the teacher found to be inappropriate times. These accounted for 22% of the management acts.

At other times such acts were made in response to the "inappropriate" use of the materials. These accounted for 17% of the number of acts. Another 4% were coded as other. In the remaining two sessions, in the middle and end of the year, the children met for reading group to discuss the book they were reading, there was little procedural complexity in this task other than that of cognitive activity. In contrast, the Breakthrough materials were procedurally more complex.

The high incidence of management acts in the middle lesson with the high group may be attributed to the fact that this was the first time when all the children were meeting to talk about a book they were all reading, in contrast to the beginning of the year when the children were not working with a shared text.

During the low group activities, Beth's management acts accounted for 20% of all turns taken across all three sessions. The majority of her management acts occurred in the beginning of the year when the group members were working with the Breakthrough materials. This accounted for 69% of the total number of management acts made across the year. The Breakthrough activity was procedurally complex in that the task required manipulation of word cards.

The data also reveal that Beth's management acts decreased across the year during both high and low group sessions. However, the percentage of the teacher turns that functioned as teacher management acts during the Breakthrough session was more than double the percentage during Phase II when the students were using their basal readers, and nearly four times as much as the percentage of management acts made during Phase III during the storybook reading session. It was believed that the task requirements of using the Breakthrough materials contributed to the high incidence of management acts during this session compared to the other low group sessions.

Given that the Breakthrough session occurred in the beginning of the year, it was necessary to compare the incidence of teacher management acts during a Breakthrough session that occurred later on in the year because one may argue that the higher incidence of management acts in the Breakthrough activity may be due to the fact that this

session occurred earlier on in the year when the students were just becoming familiar with the participation rules for small group reading instruction. To examine this further, another Breakthrough session that occurred in late January. These data are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

The Number of Teacher Management Acts During Low Group Breakthrough Activities

	Timing in Exchange		
	Middle	Boundary	Total
November	34	11	45
Late January	15	17	32

Note. The values represent the number of instances observed.

As shown in the table, the number of teacher management acts decreased from the beginning of the year to late January. Although this was a decrease from the Breakthrough activity examined in the beginning of the year, compared to the other two low group reading sessions, findings indicate that there were a higher number of management acts that occurred during the Breakthrough session in January compared to the other activities that the low group members engaged in.

Timing of Management Acts

In addition to the number of management acts initiated by Beth during high and low group reading activities, it was of interest where in the exchange structure these management acts occurred. It is assumed that management acts that occur in the middle of an exchange would be more disruptive to the flow of the activity than those which occur at the juncture or boundary of an exchange. These findings are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

The Timing of Teacher Management Acts Within the Exchange Structure During High and Low Group Reading Events

Group	Phase							
	I		II		III		Total	
	Mid	Bd	Mid	Bd	Mid	Bd	Mid	Bd
High	5	4	4	6	1	3	10	13
Low	34	11	7	7	1	5	42	23

Note. The values represent the number of instances observed. Mid = Middle of an exchange; Bd = Boundary of an exchange.

An analysis of the data for the high group lessons across the year indicate that overall, over half of the teacher management acts occurred at the boundary of exchanges. This pattern was fairly consistent across the

year.

In contrast, during low group instruction, the majority of Beth's management acts (65%) occurred in the middle of an exchange. Examining each phase separately, this was only the case when the group was working with the Breakthrough materials. When the low group was involved in a Breakthrough activity, the majority of Beth's management acts (75.5%) occurred in the middle of an exchange. During Phase II, when the group members were working with a basal reader, 50% of the acts occurred in the middle of an exchange. During Phase III, storybook reading session, the majority of the acts (83%) occurred at the boundary of an exchange.

Again the Breakthrough session that occurred later on in the year was examined for comparison. During this session, 47% of the management acts occurred in the middle of an exchange and 53% occurred at the boundary of an exchange.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that how the high and low reading groups were structured both academically and socially impacted on the opportunities the group members had to display their knowledge and also impacted on their opportunities to construct new understandings through talking about texts.

High group reading instruction seemed to create a

learning situation in which talk was used as a tool for thinking and it created a context in which knowledge could be developed and displayed by the students (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). As a result these contexts often resulted in voluntary initiations and interrupting behaviors, particularly overlapping speech. In addition to these story discussions, there were opportunities for the high group members to talk about their own personal experiences.

In contrast the low group activities did not generate the same kind of language use. Low group members had opportunities to engage in reading activities that required little use of oral language or opportunities to talk about personal experiences as it related to the reading activity. Low group members had fewer opportunities to engage in connected discourse with teachers and other children compared to high reading group events.

The high and low group activities differed in at least two important ways: the degree of structure the teacher and the materials provided, and the degree of complexity offered in the activity (Genishi, 1987). Engagement with sentence construction and completion tasks as in the case of the Breakthrough activities and reading aloud short units of text during the basal reading activity are highly structured activities. Structure provided by the teacher was evidenced by her use of individual nominations and invitations to bid to allocate turns. In addition to teacher control over

these features of the discourse, the materials provided structure to the activity. The Breakthrough and basal readers each involved the use of controlled language forms. Research suggests that a focus on language forms is not productive either for early language acquisition in the home or for expanding language at school. Rather there is evidence that suggests that a focus on varied activities leads to the use of language for varied purposes, and this variety leads to greater communicative competence (Genishi, 1987).

Follow-Up Teacher Interview

After the completion of the study, I conducted a final interview with Beth to debrief her on the research findings and to obtain her interpretation regarding her reading practices that constituted the main focus of the study.

Given her differential use of materials across ability groups, I asked Beth how she selected the materials she assigned to the different groups. Beth stated that her goal was to select materials that all of the students would find meaningful. She added that she tried to select materials that she thought would afford the opportunity to generate a substantial amount of talk. She also considered the readability of the text.

When asked if she believed the Breakthrough materials fostered meaningful engagement with the text during the low

group reading events, Beth stated that ideally the Breakthrough materials could be meaningful if there was an initial group discussion around a text followed by the students generating their own stories. She added that this would be similar to a language experience approach. In the context of such an activity, Beth explained that some of the words the students would use would be the commercially-produced Breakthrough word cards, but there would also be student-generated words. When asked why she didn't do this with the low group during their Breakthrough activities she stated that she had these students do this during their writing time.

After reviewing the research findings of the low group Breakthrough activities, Beth stated that she would most likely not use these materials in the same way. When asked why she did not use more trade books with the low group members she stated that she did not have the appropriate materials. She added that she was waiting for funding to purchase storybooks but that this did not arrive until late in the year.

Beth openly added that she had not used the Breakthrough materials enough. She stated that in the previous year she had been impressed with the way a kindergarten teacher in the school was using these materials within a language experience activity.

When asked why she had the two middle groups work primarily on their own engaged in silent reading, she stated that she believed that children learned how to read by reading.

Based on the findings of the study, I asked Beth about her thoughts on grouping children for reading instruction. She stated that she believed that effective instruction entails a combination of grouping arrangements such as independent reading time, one-on-one conferencing, and books centers for the primary grades. Books centers, she explained, may be different centers (e.g., poetry, storybooks) which students could choose to be in for one week. Within these centers, peer interaction is encouraged, struggling readers have reading buddies, and membership is flexible. During this instructional time, the teacher "floats" from one center to the next to observe and to help structure the events.

Beth stated that she felt that ability grouping does not generally meet the needs of children, adding that she did not believe that read aloud activities afford teachers the opportunity to see the reading strategies the children are using. She stated that she would rather have conferences with the children asking questions regarding what makes a book feel easy and hard, and the strategies they use when they come across a word they don't know. She did state, however, that she would have found it difficult

readers together due to their varying ability levels.

In the present study the success Beth achieved with the high readers in her ability to facilitate rich discussions around texts and to assist these children in extending their understanding should not be underestimated. In contrast, when working with the low group, Beth tended to fall back on a more traditional instructional approach. After reviewing the results of the study, Beth stated that she saw the ways she conducted instruction with the different ability groups was "consistent with the models that are out there offered in basal reading programs." She saw this as applying what she termed an "assembly line model" or "piece-meal instruction" with the students in the low group, reducing the process of reading to component skills. She then stated that "of course it is the low readers who need to start with meaning the most." She explained that she believed that the low group members were getting more meaning-oriented instruction during the Morning Meeting. In contrast, she also stated that she probably was not teaching the high readers specific strategies such as how to monitor for sense.

Beth's responses during this follow-up interview suggest that although she believed she was selecting materials that the students would find meaningful, in practice, in part due to her inexperience with the materials, and in part due to the lack of available

tradebooks appropriate to the reading levels of the low group members, the types of learning opportunities she structured for the low group during their Breakthrough activities did not result in meaningful reading activities.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to explore the interrelationships between academic and social dimensions of ability-based reading groups and how variation in particular features of these learning environments affect students' participation. The findings in the previous chapters establish that although literacy learning in general and reading in particular were of central importance in Beth's classroom, what was counted as reading (Heap, 1980) and how reading as a practice unfolded during ability-based instruction, varied across ability levels. Moreover, Beth's instructional practices within ability groups remained relatively stable throughout the year with regard to the type of materials she assigned to each group and the types of activities in which the students engaged for the majority of their reading group sessions.

For the high group, reading instruction became an instructional event during which the students were able to display their knowledge as well as develop new understandings through discussions of the trade storybooks they read. The materials with which the high group worked --literature-- supported the group members' participation in meaningful communication. Beth's use of an open turn-

elicitations, as well as her greater use of process elicitations, encouraged the high group members to volunteer their ideas and opinions. This also resulted in the group members interrupting more frequently during their group discussions as the year progressed as they were eager to contribute their ideas. The type of learning opportunities Beth structured as well as how the high group members participated in these events seemed to allow these students to go beyond their individual "abilities" or skills. This was accomplished, in part, by Beth's questioning strategies which assisted students in their thinking about the stories they read. For example, in the high group event examined in the beginning of the year, one student was asked to tell the group about the book he was reading. Through Beth's questioning procedures, she was able to model for the speaker and the other group members the types of questions the students may ask themselves and others when reading stories. Through this type of instructional strategy, Beth was able to assist the high group members in their "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978).

In contrast, the low group members worked with the Breakthrough materials for the majority of their reading group instruction. These materials and the types of Breakthrough activities in which Beth engaged the children emphasized the learning of isolated language forms with the largest unit of text typically consisting of one short

sentence. In addition, the majority of Beth's elicitations during the Breakthrough activity were product and choice elicitations, which required short verbal and nonverbal responses.

Compared to the high group reading sessions, Beth primarily used a more teacher-controlled turn-allocation procedure (i.e., individual nominations and invitations to bid) when she elicited a response from the low group members during the Breakthrough and basal reading activities. These reading events more closely resembled traditional ability-based reading lessons. Overall, the norms for communication that were created during these reading activities offered little opportunity for voluntary contributions or discussion. There were few instructional opportunities to assist students' thinking beyond their individual abilities. When the low group members engaged in a storybook reading activity, however, their voluntary initiations increased dramatically. While this finding needs to be interpreted with caution in that this event took place at the end of the year (an earlier storybook reading session was not available), some possible explanations for this change in the students' participation may be offered. First, research on storybook reading (e.g., Clay, 1991; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Martinez & Teale, 1989; Snow, 1983) suggests that this type of literacy event itself fosters discussion and social interaction. Clay (1991), among others, suggests that

storybook reading fosters the development of a variety of literacy processes and skills including strategies for sense making (e.g., making connections between pictures and meaning), vocabulary development, exposure to the structure and language of stories, as well as book enjoyment. Within the shared storybook reading activity, Beth supported the low group members attempts to make predictions based on the text, identify patterns in the text, and use cues both in the print and pictures to make sense of the text.

Second, Beth primarily used a more open-bid turn-allocation strategy with the group compared to the other two low group sessions examined. As demonstrated here, this type of turn-allocation strategy appears to facilitate talk by encouraging learners to initiate freely.

The results presented in this study confirm the existing findings in the literature which show that ability-based reading groups are offered differential instruction. Additionally, the findings shed light on some of the performance differences found in the literature which has shown that high readers interrupt less frequently from the beginning to the end of the year compared to the low group peers. This performance difference has been interpreted as a difference in competence. The results of this study suggest that the increase in the high group members' interruptions throughout the year is related to the nature of the high group's speech event, that is, story discussion

rather than the more traditional lesson.

The present study expands the sociocultural perspective in its application to literacy learning, particularly in regard to social interactions, the function of talk in cognitive growth, and expanding views of school-based literacy. The findings reported here suggest that instructional interactions involving the use of meaningful materials, where talk is encouraged and used as a tool for thinking serve to create learning environments that support learners in going beyond their own individual understandings in making sense of stories. The results reported here show that the instruction offered to the high readers focused on meaning and communication. In contrast, the emphasis during low group instruction was on skill building. Contrary to the way literacy instruction is implemented in most classrooms, it is suggested that meaning making, communication, and skill building are complementary aspects of the literacy learning process. Teachers need to engage in direct instruction of skills, when appropriate, in the context of meaningful communication around authentic reading activities (Goldenberg, 1993).

In addition to expanding our theoretical understandings, this study raises issues more directly related to educational practice. Such issues include the effectiveness of ability-based grouping practices, notions of competence, the nature of the reading curriculum, and

teacher education.

Ability-Based Grouping Practices

Over the years, researchers have questioned the effectiveness as well as the educational fairness of grouping children by ability for reading instruction. It has been suggested that membership in ability-based groups serves as a social organizer in the interpretation of experiences for both the teacher and learner. These communities of practice serve not only to organize the ways in which understandings are achieved, but also serve to mediate what constitutes knowledge (Collins, 1986). Given the results of this study, the question of the efficacy of grouping on the basis of ability needs to be raised. Should ability remain as a social organizer? If so, under what conditions? The results of this study suggest that ability grouping should not be viewed as inherently ineffective practice. Rather we need to critically examine the types of learning environments that are constructed within this type of grouping arrangement. With regard to ability-based grouping practices, we need to consider the type of materials used, the nature of the reading activities, teacher-student instructional interactions and the flexibility of the groups with regard to membership. In the low group session involving storybook reading, there was a dramatic increase in the students' voluntary initiations compared to that observed during the Breakthrough and basal

reading activities. This finding suggests that when engaged in meaningful and motivating activities in conjunction with a turn-allocation strategy that is more open and encourages student talk, students assigned to a low ability group can effectively display their knowledge. Ability grouping, as an instructional practice, may be more effective if group membership remains flexible throughout the year thus allowing for differences in individual rates of progress. Nevertheless, grouping learners on the basis of ability level has implications for the ways in which researchers and practitioners conceptualize the notion of reading competence.

Notions of Reading Competence

The results of this study suggest that reading ability or competence is complex and may be more fully understood by examining reading behaviors within the social context in which students and teachers participate. The extent to which students are able to demonstrate their thinking is, in large measure, a consequence of the task, materials, and ways in which they are asked to display that knowledge.

The Nature of the Reading Curriculum

Different types of materials have built-in theories regarding the nature of the reading process and development, the most effective ways to teach reading, and how to evaluate reading progress. Materials such as Breakthrough and many basal readers emphasize skill building and are

based on a sequential notion of reading development. The results of this study suggest that we need to critically examine the nature of the reading materials along with which aspects of the literacy learning process are emphasized for reading instruction. We need to ask the question, what type of reading knowledge or skills do particular types of materials and activities foster. This has implications for teacher education.

Practitioners and researchers need to consider the types of experiences students have for displaying their knowledge and constructing meaning through their talk about texts as well as the type of experiences that will assist students in the development of effective problem-solving strategies for deciphering print. All students need practice in literacy activities that foster the development of comprehension and the construction of meaning as well as the development of skills. If our goal is to create a future of readers and writers, we need to provide teachers with training in how to create effective literacy learning opportunities which are both holistic and meaning-oriented and which do not ignore the need for students to practice skills. Additionally, teachers need material resources that will support this type of instructional practice.

Appendix

Coding Scheme For Ability-Based Reading Groups

I. Data Collection Period

- a. Phase I
- b. Phase II
- c. Phase III

II. Ability Group

- a. High
- b. Middle-high
- c. Middle-low
- d. Low

III. Physical Location of the Ability-based Reading Groups

- a. Rug/Floor
- b. Table

IV. Type of Print Material Used By Ability-Based Reading Groups

- a. Breakthrough
 - word chart and sentence maker
 - word chart and individual child breakthrough folders
- b. Basal Readers
 - b.1 Bears
 - b.2 Balloons
 - b.3 Boats
 - b.4 Sunshine
 - b.5 Towers
- c. Trade Book
- d. Sentence strips
- e. Experience chart
- f. Reading game
- g. Reading Journals
- h. None
- i. Other

V. Event Phase

- a. Setting Up Phase
- b. Instructional Phase
- c. Closing Phase

VI. Type of Reading Activity

- a. Storybook reading to the group
- b. Discussion of story
- c. Silent reading
- d. Reading aloud
- e. Word identification
- f. Sentence construction
- g. Sentence completion
- h. Writing sentences in journals
- i. Other

VII. Type of Initiation Acts

A. Teacher Initiations

1. **Directive.** Request for action that gives procedural or preparatory information (e.g., "Go get the book you are in the middle of reading.")
2. **Choice Elicitation.** Calls upon the respondent to agree or disagree with the statement by the questioner. This elicitation contains the information that the respondent needs in order to form the reply (e.g., "Is this the letter B?") (Mehan, 1979).
3. **Product Elicitation.** Asks respondent to provide a factual response such as a name, a place, a date, or a color (e.g., "What letter is that?") (Mehan, 1979).
4. **Process Elicitation.** Asks for respondents' opinions or interpretations (e.g., "What did you like about the book?") (Mehan, 1979).
5. **Metaprocess Elicitation.** Asks respondents to be reflective about the process of making connections between elicitations and responses. Requires students to provide the rule or procedure by which they have arrived at or remembered answers (e.g., "How did you figure that out?"; "How did you know that word was --?") (Mehan, 1979).
6. **Check.** Questions the function of which is to enable the teacher to ascertain whether there are any problems preventing the successful progress of the lesson. Realized by closed class of questions concerned with being finished or ready having problems or difficulties being able to see or hear. (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975)

7. **Informative.** Expressions of information, rules, explanations or descriptions of lesson content, or of students' roles (e.g., "Today we are going to talk about how Helen learned to communicate.")(Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

8. **Genuine Question.** Realized by questions that the speaker does not already know the answer to (e.g., "Did you ever move from one apartment to another?")(Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

9. **Request for Clarification/Repeats.** Utterance designed to elicit an utterance again from the same person, such as "What did you say?"

10. **Reinitiations.** Realized by speaker reinitiating an utterance to which there was an incorrect or incomplete answer or when more than one response is requested.

11. **Other.**

B. Student Initiations

Defined as - Any question, comment, statement or nonverbal act that is unsolicited by the teacher or other member from the group.

VIII. Responses

A. Requirements of Student Response

1. Nonverbal
2. Verbal

1. Type of Nonverbal Response

1.1 **React.** (e.g., moving seat, sharpening pencil, closing closet doors, etc.) Realized by a non-linguistic action. Its function is to provide the appropriate non-linguistic response defined by the preceding directive.

1.2 **Pointing.**

1.3 **Rearranging materials.**

Type of Verbal Response

2.1 Reply. Realized by statements and questions. Response to genuine question.

2.2 Choice Response. Provides a Yes or No answer or the information present in the choice elicitation.

2.3 Product Response. Provides a factual response such as a name, a date, or a color.

2.4 Process Response. Provides an opinion or interpretation.

2.5 Metaprocess Response. Provides the reasoning or rule by which one has arrived at an answer.

IX Teacher Feedback

Responses were coded into five categories: **Reprimand, Interrupt, Ignore, Acknowledge, and Respond.**

1. Reprimand: The teacher explicitly discourages the student from responding further.

Example: Mark: I WILL GO (reads text)
Teacher: Shhh.

2. Interrupt: The teacher stops the student before he or she has completed the turn.

Example: Nat: Two of my fish died/
Teacher: Hold it. Before we get too involved in a fish discussion I want to get back to Molly.

3. **Ignore:** The teacher does not respond positively or negatively to the student's comment (i.e., the teacher does not say anything or does not orient her next comment to that student).

Example: Teacher: So how did you feel after your fish died, after you put all that work into it?
 (Addressing Nat)
 Cary : But not all of them. I had three of them and then one died and now I have two.
 Teacher: How did you feel after putting so much work into it, Nat?

4. **Acknowledge:** The teacher makes at least one comment related to the student's comment while oriented to that student.

Example: Edward: That says, GO
 Teacher: Yes. It says, GO, right there. You're absolutely right.

5. **Respond:** The teacher offers a reply to the student's question.

Example: Jack : What about the red bird?
 Teacher: The red bird doesn't talk on this page.

X. Turn-Allocation-Procedures

a. Teacher-Initiated Procedures:

1. **Individual Nomination.** (n) The function of nomination is to call on or give permission to a student to contribute to the discourse

2. **Invitation to Bid.** (b) The function is to signal a desire to contribute to the discourse.

3. **Invitation to Reply** - Opens the floor to everyone/anyone to reply (e.g., uses of wh-questions; Chorus elicitations; sentence completion

XI. Student Interruptions

Based on an inductive analysis, three types of student interrupting behaviors were identified. These included:

Based on an inductive analysis, three types of student interrupting behaviors were identified. These included:

1) **Turn violation** defined as an instance when a student has the floor and a second speaker interrupts for the purpose of displaying knowledge. This typically occurs before the first speaker completes his or her turn.

2) **Insertions.** Two types of insertions were identified in the data. **Type I Insertions** were Requests for clarification. These are requests for the speaker to repeat his or her utterance. **Type II Insertions** were Assistance behaviors. These are one student's attempt to assist or help another student who has the floor. Both types of interruptions typically occur before the nominated student responded.

3) A third type of interrupting behavior identified involves students speaking simultaneously. This type of interruption behavior was labelled, **Overlap**.

4) Interrupting behaviors that did not fall into one of the above three categories were coded as **Other**. This type of interrupting behavior occurred infrequently.

XII. Teacher Management Acts

Example: Teacher: Now. Martha made a sentence and Edward made a sentence and let's take a look at them. Let's take a look at Edward's sentence first.
 Edward : (lies down on his stomach)
 Teacher-E: Edward, I've asked you to sit up
 Edward: Oh, I forgot.

Timing/placement of child initiation or teacher redirection in exchange structure:

1. **Middle of exchange:** Interruptions that occur in the middle of an exchange.

2. **Boundary of exchange:** Interruptions that occur at the juncture or boundary of an exchange.

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