Constructing Literacy: How Goals, Activity Systems, and Text Shape Classroom Practice

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Social interaction is important in students' reproduction and transformation of culturally, socially grounded knowledge and skills, as well as their appropriation of the various roles that participation in social groups entails. A focus on social interaction in classrooms provides important perspectives on how teachers' and students' actions and the characteristics of the learning environment shape classroom interactions and outcomes. Using situated learning and cultural-historical activity theories as a framework, our purpose in this case study was to identify and describe features of the classroom context that were important in shaping students' participation in the classroom literacy community. Goals for participation, activity systems, and texts used and produced emerged as profound influences on students' opportunities to participate. Research into how students and teachers construct classroom literacy communities can deepen our understanding of the mutually constitutive relation between contextual elements within classrooms and students' opportunities to learn and to succeed.

Interviewer: What does it mean to do English in Camilla's class?

Students: English is boring. It makes you want to go to sleep. If you know how to write sentences and spell and you know how to read, you know English.

Interviewer: What does it mean to be a reader in this class?

Students: To know what you're reading about. Not just reading the words, but understand. I love to read. (Student focus group #2)
These students' perceptions of English (in this case, grammar and writing) and reading are strikingly different, although they learned about both subjects in the same class from the same teacher, Camilla. For them, reading is meaningful and enjoyable, while English is skills-based and numbing. Comments such as these led us to explore how construction of content is shaped by participation in classroom practices. We particularly wanted to understand what features of classroom communities are important in shaping students' engagement in and contribution to literacy practices.

Camilla, whose middle school English and reading classroom provided the setting for the study, took over the class at mid-year, replacing the previous teacher who had retired. The differences between Camilla and the retired teacher were immense in the ways they orchestrated learning interactions and classroom literacy activities. For example, the previous teacher had a predictable, immutable schedule (e.g., vocabulary on Monday, sentence worksheets on Tuesday, read aloud on Wednesday, spelling test on Thursday, quiz on Friday), while Camilla was highly unpredictable. Students in a focus group claimed that "Plans can be thrown out the window if she has an idea driving to school." Her approach included changing students' seating arrangement weekly and having a very diverse schedule of activities across time. Camilla's arrival in the class constituted a radical change in the students' lives as they participated in the developing classroom community. For this research, the class represented an opportunity to study a classroom community as it was responding to a major event (Camilla's arrival), and to explore elements of the setting that were important to the teacher's and students' construction of a community of literacy practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Given our focus on how context and participation influenced what reading and English came to mean, we turned to social constructivist theoretical frameworks to guide our study.

Vygotsky's (1987) ideas about the social construction of knowledge have provided an important foundation for research into the roles played by teachers, students, and contexts in learning interactions (e.g., Lee, 2000; Moll, 1990; Presser & Kozulin, 1992; Rogoff & Gardner, 1984; Wertsch, 1985). A central theme in this research is that much of the learning process is social. This perspective enlarges our understanding of learning to acknowledge that students reproduce and transform culturally, socially grounded knowledge and skills, and appropriate various roles that are part of participation in social groups. Such notions of learning extend the idea that individual students actively create meaning and knowledge (Freire, 1993; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Lamon, 1995) to recognize sociocultural influences on learning. Our interest was to understand this reproduction, transformation, and appropriation in classroom literacy communities. Thus, it was necessary to identify and describe features of classroom contexts that shape participation and the mutually constitutive relations between activity and context.
We concentrated in this case study on how everyday routines and practices influenced students' opportunities to participate and contribute to the classroom literacy community. We found that profound influences on students' opportunities to participate were 1) goals the teacher and students had for classroom participation; 2) the activity systems that characterized whole-class, independent seatwork, and small-group reading and English instruction; and 3) verbal and written texts. These three features of the classroom context and their interrelations structured the literacy practices of the emerging classroom community and, therefore, students' transformation of participation as members of that community. Thus, this study contributes to our understanding of how the mutually constitutive relations between classroom structures and activity are constructed as a consequence of participation in classroom literacy practices. We begin with the theoretical grounding for the study, followed by presentation of the contextual elements that emerged as influential in shaping students' participation. Finally, we explore the explanatory power of examining learning as integral to engagement in social practice, given the focus on the mutually constitutive relations between concrete activity and the nature of what is learned.

Theoretical Framework

Research into how students and teachers construct literacy communities is important to understanding how dynamic interactions between classroom contexts and activity shape literacy learning in schools. A focus on learning as integral to engagement in classroom practices can highlight those combinations of contextual elements (e.g., grouping students, teachers' questioning strategies) that structure students' opportunities to learn. Identification of these structuring elements then furthers our understanding of the ways in which literacy learning is shaped by classroom contexts, and can lend important information to understanding the construction of positive, generative classroom literacy communities. Several researchers have explored how students' learning and identity as literate people are shaped by participation in literacy practices and discourse. Cochran-Smith (1984) examined how students become readers, while Kantor, Green, Bradley, and Lin (1992) studied the effects on collective norms for classroom discourse of students' participation in communication and interaction. Rex (2001) studied how students came to be "remade" as readers in a high school class designed explicitly to disrupt the distinctions of students as gifted versus low-ability. Our work focuses on how content is constructed through participation in classroom literacy practices.

The aim was not to evaluate the nature of the community that formed, but to identify and describe dynamic features of the classroom context that were important in students' participation in classroom literacy activity. Those features are important as structuring elements that take on meaning through activity: "when
Soviet psychologists speak of the 'structure of an activity,' they have in mind something very different from what has come to be known as 'structuralism' in Western psychology. The units they use are defined on the basis of the function they fulfill rather than any intrinsic properties they possess” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 19). Thus, dynamic notions of structure characterize this stance. Similarly, Rogoff (1995) claims that “learning is seen as structured by activity, and research involves examining the emergent structure of activities that . . . link one social activity to another and thus organize learning and cognition across activity contexts” (p. 129). To understand the structuring of participation in literacy learning, we analyzed activity that embodied classroom practices (e.g., small group instruction) and individuals’ contributions to those practices (e.g., classroom dialogue).

A sociocultural perspective addresses context broadly to include activity and goals in addition to text or discourse, to examine in this case classroom literacy practices and their influence on the construction of knowledge. We adopted Gutierrez and Stone’s (2000) “syncretic framework”, or “the principled and strategic use of a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to examine individual actions, as well as the goals and history of those actions . . . to make visible and document the intricate and dynamic social processes of literacy practices” (p. 150, 151). Thus, we draw on situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and on cultural-historical activity theories (CHAT, Cole, 1995; Engeström, 1999; Leont’ev, 1932) to investigate participation in goal-directed classroom settings, routines, and texts. To examine the relationships between activity, structure, and text in this classroom, as well as the influence of larger institutional forces we use Engeström’s (1999) and Gutierrez and Stone’s (2000) definitions of activity systems, and Bakhtin’s (1981) and Lotman’s (1988) theories of discourse and text function, respectively. We use Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory, particularly their definitions of learning and participation, to examine the classroom as an emerging community of literacy practice.

**Activity, Structure, and Text**

**Activity Systems**
Engeström (1999) defines activity systems as containing mediating artifacts (signs and tools), subject, object, community, and rules; and Gutierrez and Stone (2000) define them “as a social practice that includes the norms, values, division of labor, and goals of the community” (p. 151). Attending to these systems allows us to deepen our understanding of how literacy practices are constructed through students’ and teachers’ interactions in classroom settings that are organized by both local and institutional structures, i.e., classroom norms for participation and institutional values communicated through testing and use of state-adopted textbooks:
Examining activity systems affords the possibility of focusing simultaneously on the critical elements of learning practices... An understanding of the community level accounts for how the social and discursive practices of the learning community shape what gets learned, who gets to learn, and how that learning is organized. (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000, p. 159)

The focus on how practice shapes what gets learned in this study illuminates how English and reading are constructed as content areas. As we will show, the activity systems that characterized English and reading in this classroom transformed students’ participation in very different ways because of striking differences in patterns of text use and production, norms for interaction, division of labor, and goals.

**Mediating Functions of Text**

Text, an important mediating artifact in activity systems, is defined following Bloom and Egan-Robertson (1993):

> A text is the product of textualizing. People textualize experience and the world in which they live, making those phenomena part of a language system (broadly defined). Text can be written, oral, signed, electronic, pictorial, etc. A text can refer to a string of words, a conventional or written routine or structure, a genre of written language (e.g., poetry), as well as a genre of social activities or event types. (p. 311)

This definition affords the opportunity to examine received and constructed text, both of which are important to understanding the development of literacy practice.

Lotman (1988) posits a functional duality of text in that it can serve as a means of either transmission or generation of meaning. The transmission function serves to communicate meaning, while the generative function serves to facilitate the construction of meaning. Lotman further claims that the transmission function serves to raise “text to the status of a standard... guaranteeing that a message will be adequately received in a system of communication; no less important is its function of providing a common memory for the group, of transforming it from an unstructured crowd” (cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 75). Also, the generative function reflects the fact that the main structural attribute of a text in this second function is its internal heterogeneity... Among other things, the dynamic processes of this semiotic space allow for the production of a continual stream of new interpretations of a text much like those produced as new readers encounter a work of fiction. (Wertsch, 1991, p. 75-76)

Texts used and produced in Camilla’s class, then, can be seen as structuring students’ participation in either reproductive or generative ways.
Bakhtin's (1981) notions of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse also capture the structuring functions of text used and produced. Authoritative discourse constrains meaning making: "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority fused to it" (cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 78). Examples include textbooks and certain categories of teachers' talk (e.g., recitation-style dialogues) that are to be accepted, not interpreted. Alternately, internally persuasive discourse (e.g., small group-constructed meaning) invites interpretation and the generation of new knowledge: "The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean" (Bakhtin, 1981, cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 79). Here, texts produced through the interaction of teachers and students generate knowledge, understanding, and can transform traditional classroom practice to embrace students' active participation.

Classroom Activity as the Unit of Analysis

In keeping with a CHAT framework, we examined classroom activity as the unit of analysis to understand the unique learning that results from interaction with and within classroom communities. Wertsch (1995) advocates using action as the unit of analysis, stressing that

mental functioning and sociocultural setting be understood as dialectically interacting moments, or aspects of a more inclusive unit of analysis — human action . . . [that] provides a context within which the individual and society (as well as mental functioning and sociocultural context) are understood as interrelated moments. (p. 60)

Rather than examining features of classroom contexts as static entities, this approach requires investigating them as interacting elements in dynamic relation to each other. The focus on the contextualized nature of learning and activity also provides a theoretical bridge between cultural-historical activity and situated learning theories. As Borko (2001) claims,

A situative perspective assumes that knowledge is inseparable from the contexts and activities in which it develops. . . . Situative perspectives posit that the physical and social context in which an activity takes place is an integral part of the activity, and that the activity is an integral part of the learning that takes place within it. (p. 1)

Thus, while CHAT provides a framework for examining the relations between local activity (classroom) and larger, institutional and social activity (external testing mandates, adoption of state-approved textbooks), situated learning theories provide important lenses for focusing closely on activity within the classroom.
Communities of Practice

Participation
In situated learning theories, participation in social practices (e.g., modes of discourse, coordination of activity, working toward shared goals) is the means by which people gain knowledge, skills, and identities particular to communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning and development are inherent in engaging in the social, cultural, and historical practices characteristic of communities of practice, whether the setting is a craft apprenticeship (cf., Lave, 1988), a workplace (Wenger, 1998), a researcher/practitioner partnership group (Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1999), or a classroom (Ares, 1998; Lee, 2000; Moll, 1990). Further, types of opportunities to participate in social practices shape the depth and breadth of knowledge and skills and whether participation in the community proceeds in positive or negative manners. Participation here does not imply simple reproduction of community practices; rather, because communities exist over time and are formed through activity, both reproduction and transformation of practice are involved. Some settings or communities of practice afford participants access to the full range of community practices (e.g., Yucatec Mayan midwives, Lave & Wenger, 1991), while others are structured in ways that hinder that access (e.g., butchers in the US, Marshall, 1972, cited in Lave & Wenger, 1991). That access or lack of access is critical to the opportunities participants have to become fully contributing members of communities. In other words, access to opportunity bounds legitimacy of participation by shaping the types of activity in which community members can engage. Of particular import to this study, interactions among participants, assignments of tasks, and access to resources and responsibility shape knowledge, skills, and legitimacy of participation in classroom literacy practices.

Learning
Situated learning is conceptualized as transformation of participation rather than simply the construction of knowledge and meaning:

The form that the legitimacy of participation takes is a defining characteristic of ways of belonging, and is therefore not only a crucial condition for learning, but a constitutive element of its content... Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. Changing locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 34)

Rogoff, White, and Matusov (1996) propose a similar view of learning: This stance 'distinguishes theories of development that cast learning as a community process of transformation of participation in sociocultural activities from theories that cast
learning as a one-sided process in which only teachers or learners are responsible for learning” (p. 388). Such transformation is evident in Lave’s (1988) descriptions of apprentice tailors’ movement into more sophisticated phases of production — their initial work involves stitching hems and other finishing details; over time they move to sewing seams, cutting out pattern pieces, and finally to completing whole garments. It is also evident in Rogoff and Gardner’s (1984) investigation of children’s changing roles in a classification task, where a mother used a story to help in remembering in which boxes the items were to be placed:

The mother devised a story incorporating the first three out of six category boxes . . . The child contributed slightly to the story for the fourth category, and invented part of the story for the last two category boxes . . . Finally, the mother asked the child to tell the story independently as a review, ensuring that the child could manage the whole story structure. (as cited in Rogoff, 1990, p. 106)

These examples of transformation of participation highlight change in individuals’ activity and, therefore, learning as they interact with and within sociocultural settings. In that vein, we were interested in understanding how individuals’ changing participation in everyday classroom routines and practices influenced the construction of classroom literacy. Learning as transformation of participation provided an important perspective on participants’ activity and the characteristics of the classroom community.

Taken together, cultural historical activity and situated learning theories offered us a powerful framework to examine the complexity inherent in the classroom, viewing it as a community of literacy practice operating with and within institutional and historical realms. The “principled and strategic use” (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000, p. 150) of these rich traditions guided our analysis and facilitated connecting structure, activity, and text in Camilla and her students’ construction of literacy.

Setting

We conducted the study in a working-class middle school outside New Orleans, Louisiana. Twenty-three students were in the class, 10 boys and 13 girls, ranging in age from 11 to 13 years. Two of the boys were African American; the rest of the students were European American. This sixth-grade English and reading class met for a 100-minute block. The classroom was the site of all instructional activities during the weeks of observation, and textbooks and workbooks were the primary sources of instructional materials. There was a computer in the classroom, but it was rarely turned on. There was no evidence of use of other facilities, including the library and the schools’ computer labs, in students’ work or in the classroom discourse. Students corroborated our impression: “We’re different from everybody else. We’re our own little world; we made up our own nationality” (Student focus group #1).
Camilla, a European American woman in her mid-thirties, had been teaching for eight years, three of them at this middle school. Trained as an elementary educator, she had taught reading throughout her career, but this was her first experience teaching English. She had been the school’s computer teacher, but the principal assigned her mid-year to teach this class as part of a grade-level team, despite her inexperience in teaching. Institutional values related to the need for domain expertise versus general teaching strategies expertise were reflected in the principal’s actions and Camilla’s willingness to take on unfamiliar content. As became clear, those values had an important impact on the local, classroom construction of reading and English.

Camilla’s class was chosen for this study because classroom observations and interviews with her and some of her students indicated that she included learner-centered approaches to teaching that welcomed students’ active involvement and social interaction. This was important because we wanted to explore a setting in which students had substantive opportunities to influence the classroom community.

Nancy Ares designed and conducted the larger study of which this paper is a part. Her interest in exploring classrooms as communities of practice is reflected in the focus on the mutually constitutive relation between activity and structure here. Underlying that interest is commitment to equity in opportunities to participate and to construct knowledge and meaning. Her research design and analysis of the data were centered on identifying features of the classroom that afforded and hindered such opportunities. Megan Peercy collaborated on re-conceptualizing and re-writing portions of that larger work to speak more directly to literacy practice. Her interests in power and language in classrooms helped clarify how a sociocultural lens can help in examining what types of literacy practice emerge from activity.

Research Design

Observational, interview, and artifact data were gathered over the second, fourth, seventh, and eighteenth weeks of classes after the Winter Break in December. Observations were recorded in a field notebook for the first week; classroom activities were videotaped the other three weeks. A formal interview with Camilla was conducted during each week of observation. Field notes about informal conversations were also written. Interviews were semi-structured, forming a framework within which we could follow-up and elaborate on her responses and on previously collected data and observations. The questions addressed a range of issues, including her teaching philosophy, her goals for student learning, and the ways in which she structured the classroom and classroom interactions.

Sixteen students participated in two rounds of focus group interviews; each interview involved four students. Camilla was asked initially to recommend students to
interview; however, she identified only the more dominant students in the class. Observations of classroom interactions lead to the identification of the more reticent students, who were also invited to participate in focus groups. Having dominant students and quiet students interviewed in separate groups seemed to allow the quiet students to voice their opinions more freely; students who rarely volunteered to speak in class shared their views readily in the interviews. Students in all groups tended to build on each others' answers, so the data reflect their consensus views. Seven students did not return consent letters from their parents or guardians, so they were unavailable. These interviews were also semi-structured. At the end of the initial interviews, we asked students to bring to the next session something they had done in class that they could use to represent what went on in their classroom (they brought creative writing projects, class notebooks, and arts-based English activities). Questions about those artifacts centered on reasons for choosing them and how they reflected their classroom experiences.

In our analyses, we often treated students as a group with a collective identity rather than as a collection of people with individual identities. Individuals' unique experiences and perceptions can be diluted as they are subsumed into analyses of the collective experiences of the group. For example, the work of Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, and Hinson (1999) on gendered discursive practices and of Moje and Sheppardson (1998) on asymmetrical power relations in peer-peer interactions provide important cautions for treating groups as homogeneous, non-problematic entities. Our analyses are bounded by our focus on students as a group. In a similar vein, we describe classroom activities in broad terms (e.g., print-based, whole class, and group-construction) that may mask the development of individual skills or the efficacy of particular teaching strategies. Our reporting does not provide a close look at individuals' knowledge and skills nor at the effects of particular teaching methods on student learning. Rather, we concentrated on patterns over time in classroom-level activity and interaction.

**Analysis**

Data from each type of interview were analyzed continuously through a process of theme identification, verification, and further data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to discern themes both within and across them. For example, goals for participation were analyzed based on academic and social-role learning; this analysis was spurred by classroom observations in which activities, interactions, and teacher and student dialogue formed two distinct, virtually non-overlapping categories, as captured in the following quotes:

*Academic: Camilla: Who can give me an example of an adjective?*
Henry: Green.

Camilla: Good. Adjectives describe things, like the color. (field notes, Week 2)

Social-role: Juana: “Betty is absent. Can I be her homework helper?” (field notes, Week 4)

We analyzed videotaped observations using two approaches: 1) a coding system was developed to tabulate students' and Camilla's contributions to classroom talk (see

**Table 1.** Coding system for whole-class activity observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA?V</td>
<td>teacher-posed academic question, volunteered answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA?N</td>
<td>teacher-posed academic question, non-volunteered answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA?</td>
<td>student-posed academic question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>teacher academic comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>called on to read aloud, volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN</td>
<td>called on to read aloud, non-volunteer</td>
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</tbody>
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**Social-role learning:** procedural or routine-focused questions, comments (e.g., did you put your name at the top? Are you the helper of the day? Sharpen your pencil during homeroom. You need to ask your leader for that. Are we having a spelling test today?)

questions or comments related to classroom etiquette, interpersonal relations (You need to say Yes, ma'am. How are you supposed to ask for help?)

actions that give students special privileges or responsibilities (e.g., Camilla requesting help with classroom chores, student volunteering to do classroom chore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TS?V</td>
<td>teacher-posed social learning question, volunteered answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>TS?N</td>
<td>teacher-posed social learning question, non-volunteered answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC</td>
<td>teacher social learning comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSC</td>
<td>student social learning comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>teacher-requested chore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVC</td>
<td>student-volunteered chore</td>
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Table 1); and 2) we created data sheets, patterned after analysis reported by Tuyay, Floriani, Yeager, Dixon, and Green (1995), to record academic content (e.g., adverbs in English), literate and social practices (individuals in whole class reading aloud, small groups working together), patterns of organization of students (whole class, small group, independent seat work), text used and produced (e.g., print-based, whole-class constructed), and time spent (see Table 3). These methods are described in more detail in later sections. Two member-checking interviews with Camilla validated and refined our identification of themes. Parallel searches for negative examples were also conducted.

Elements Shaping Students’ Participation

Data analyses revealed that a) Camilla’s and her students’ goals for participation, as well as Camilla’s goals for reading and English; b) three activity systems that characterized whole-class, independent seat work, and small-group instruction; and c) verbal and written texts used and produced shaped the opportunities students had to participate in the classroom literacy community. The manner in which opportunities to participate developed over the course of the class had direct impact on students’ involvement in the construction of the classroom literacy community and the transformation of their participation. Goals are presented briefly first to set the stage for understanding the structuring functions of activity systems and text.

Goals for Literacy and Participation

Although activity systems are defined to include system-specific goals, our analyses revealed broader goals that were influential across the three distinct activity systems in this classroom. Camilla’s goals for literacy learning and her and the students’ goals for participation served as structuring elements that delimited the types of interactions, instructional activities, and classroom norms that could be constructed in each activity system. Identifying Camilla’s goals is important to describing the landscape of opportunities afforded students because they guided her interactions with students and the kinds of activities that were deemed appropriate. Goals for participation that emerged from Camilla’s interviews include teacher as potent force in the classroom, flexibility within a framework (e.g., using a variety of instructional strategies to facilitate students’ performance relative to State curriculum standards), classroom as community, and increasing the use of group work. All those goals and their interrelations were evident in that, no matter the instructional activity, Camilla was largely in control of the pace and direction of instructional activities. She utilized the state-adopted textbooks ("I just follow the manual"), but also interspersed her own, more creative approaches (e.g., skits that allowed students to use knowledge of adjectives). Students’ courteous comments honoring classmates’ contributions were praised. Finally, group
work was used as incentive to conform to rules ("If y'all don't talk quieter, I'll put you back in rows and you'll work by yourselves!"), and as a reward for good behavior or performance ("Y'all did so well on that, I think I'll let you work in your groups next week, too").

Camilla's particular goals for literacy make clear her comfort and familiarity with reading and her unease with English:

*Interviewer:* If we focus on reading in particular, what would be the best way to teach reading?

*Camilla:* I don't believe there's one way to teach reading. I believe that you have to teach reading in a variety of different ways. I believe that reading is much more than reading... I mean you can say a young student can recite a 15-letter word to you but if they can't decode it and break it apart and find the meaning then that's not reading... I don't believe there's one way to teach reading because they all learn in different ways. (Interview #1)

Reading for Camilla was a combination of skills and comprehension, or finding meaning. She also recognized that learning to read takes on many different guises.

Questions about English elicited a very different picture:

*Interviewer:* Goals for English?

*Camilla:* Get through the parts of speech! There just has to be an easier way!... I want to keep the tradition of groups and the hands-on in English; I have to find a way. I will find a way, but I have to work toward it. English is more like math, very structured. 1 + 1 = 2 because that's the way it is; an adverb modifies the verb because that's the way it works.

*Interviewer:* Goals for students as speakers and consumers of English?

*Camilla:* I don't know. Most people don't know the parts of speech. I don't know that I want them to memorize parts of speech. I want to get more into writing sentences, paragraphs, narratives, more creative writing. I don't know with English. I really don't know. (Interview #2)

Clearly, Camilla was feeling lost in English. She did articulate plans to develop more ways to incorporate groups and hands-on activities, but they were seemingly at odds with her formulaic notion of English.

The relative ease she felt in reading versus English influenced her goals, goals that were reflected in the ways that she orchestrated the classroom in the two content
areas. As presented later, the activity systems that characterized English versus reading instruction were strikingly different. In addition, patterns in texts used and produced in each activity setting were unique.

Identifying students' goals is also important because they structured the ways that students would respond to opportunities to participate. For example, shared goals for working in groups served to guide students' learning quickly to work collectively and their construction of clear norms for behavior while working together. The following segment of a focus group interview with students captures those goals that were consistently stated across all students interviewed:

Q: Is there a typical day [in Camilla's class]?

A: No, not with [Camilla]. (Group agreement)

Q: Describe some stuff that happens, some stuff that she does.

A: Activities; plays; skits; leaders. Changes every day. Poems. She gets us into different groups.

Q: Why do you think she does that?

A: To make it fun. Won't get bored. 'Cause she's nice and fun. Keep it interesting. So we don't do the same things over and over.

Q: What do you think you get out of it?

A: A lot. Learn about how to work in groups. Group work helps kids who aren't doing as well because students can help each other. Before, we'd each think about the questions, but now with 5 people and 5 questions, we each get one. (Student focus group, Week 7)

Students' goals overlapped with their teacher's in terms of valuing group work, appreciating variety in instruction, and classroom as community. Shared work and decision making emerged as components of the group work goal ("now with 5 people and 5 questions, we each get one"). Camilla's goal of incorporating flexibility within a framework was paralleled by the students' goals of being able to engage in varied instructional activities; they articulated their interest in varied instruction by connecting lack of boredom to interesting, meaningful instructional activities. They also pinpointed group work as valuable in providing them ways to give and get help, creating a sense of community that included mutual assistance.

Students' and Camilla's goals provided a foundation for the interactions, instructional activities, and classroom norms characteristic of this emerging literacy community.
From that foundation, the activity systems associated with whole-class, small group, and independent seat work instruction, and texts used and produced emerged as important structures that shaped student participation in literacy practice.

**Activity Systems and Texts**

Three systems of activity served as a structuring element that delimited the types of opportunities available to students as they engaged in classroom literacy practices, while the verbal and written texts of the classroom structured students’ appropriation of those opportunities. Change over time in activity systems and texts presented a picture of Camilla’s and her students’ process of constructing a classroom literacy community via reproduction and transformation of traditional teacher-centered classroom practices. We begin by examining how Camilla organized instructional time into the three activity systems. Next, we explore the texts that Camilla and her students used and produced in reading and in English.

**Activity Systems**

As noted, we utilize Engeström’s (1999) and Gutierrez and Stone’s (2000) definitions of activity system as a social process involving community goals and values, division of labor, rules, and mediating tools and signs. In Camilla’s classroom, the organization of literacy instruction into whole class, small group, and independent seatwork provided three strikingly different activity systems that each embodied unique literacy practices. The contrasting nature of the three activity systems and the amount of time spent in them in English compared to reading served as important structuring elements in students’ literacy learning. Interviews with Camilla revealed that those distinctive patterns were consistent in the weeks between observations, until Week 18. Camilla attributed the abrupt changes that week to two factors: 1) The week before had been taken up with school-wide testing, eliminating small group work, and 2) her focus shifted to finishing up the year (e.g., completing notebooks, finishing workbooks).

**English Instruction**

As Figure 1 illustrates, most time in English instruction was spent in whole-class work, followed by independent seatwork. Data show a move to more small-group and less independent work, but time in whole-class instruction remained high and fairly static. The following exchange illustrates the nature of the whole-class activity system that dominated English instruction (all names are pseudonyms):

*Camilla:* Page 82, um, it said to rewrite the sentence with the correct pronoun. Do number 1 for me, um, Jerry.

*Jerry:* I looked at the photograph of Sue’s mother.

*Camilla:* Very good. Number 2, um, Lester?

Citation: [See citation for this article here]
Lester: She was singing a song about the castle.

Camilla: Very good. Derrick, number 3.

Derrick: We asked two questions about the castle.

Camilla: Okay, very good. Heather.

Heather: He explained the purpose of having moats around castles.

Camilla: Very good, and the last one, Juana?

Juana: They were important for protecting against intruders.

Camilla: Very good. Now that wasn't hard at all (classroom observation, Week 4).

*Figure 1.* Organization of instructional time in three activity systems in English and reading. Time devoted to English instruction in Week 2 was not observed.
Table 2. Percentages of teacher- and student-initiated classroom talk in whole-class instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th></th>
<th>Week 18</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As captured in the preceding dialogue, students reproduced familiar, traditional classroom practices that were teacher- and textbook-centered and teacher-directed. Their contribution to verbal text was extremely limited because they were responding to rather than initiating dialogue; their responses were limited to very short, knowledge- or comprehension-level answers. A comparison of the amount of teacher-versus student-initiated talk showed that during all whole-class work, Camilla was responsible for initiating the vast majority of the dialogue (see Table 2). She averaged 1.78 questions or comments per minute, with students responding to her calling on them to answer, but they asked very few questions and made few comments, averaging 0.38 questions or comments per minute. As a result, a high value was placed on getting through content and very little elaboration of Camilla’s or students’ contributions to whole-class discussion was in evidence.

In this activity system, decisions about division of labor were solely Camilla’s, and the goals and values for participation centered on students’ passive involvement in textbook-focused activity. Whole-class literacy practices in English were largely limited to verbally filling in the blanks, and extended, interactive discussions of content were extremely rare.

Independent seat work, which until Week 18 was observed only in English instruction, was a wholly different setting in which literacy practices were constructed. Students were expected to work silently and alone on either workbook or textbook exercises or on individual writing assignments. Camilla’s interactions with students were limited to keeping them on task, reminding individual students to continue working, and telling them to put away extraneous materials. Students could not ask each other for help. Rules and division of labor centered on individual engagement with instructional materials.

Together with whole class activity, independent seat work provided students particular types of opportunities to engage in English instruction that were largely reproductive of traditional school-based learning. As a result, students’ activity was mainly
limited to passive following of Camilla's and the textbook's lead, or an essentially solitary venture in which meaning was chiefly individually constructed. In response to interview questions about what it was to learn English in Camilla's class, students said that English was "boring," "nap time," and "easy but boring" (focus group interview #3, Week 7). Thus, implications for their literacy learning are that they were not being challenged intellectually, nor were they motivated to learn. Both activity systems embody historical and familiar elements of larger institutional, social "rules [that] refer to the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system" (Engeström, 1993, p. 67). The horizontal division of labor is largely teacher-controlled, and power and status (vertical division) rested mostly with Camilla.

**Reading Instruction**

A similar trend of increasing small group and decreasing independent work emerged in reading, but proportional changes were more dramatic from Week 2 to Week 7 (see Figure 1). Small group instruction consisted of students being given a task and the responsibility for negotiating roles, dividing work assignments among the group, and maintaining order. For example, in one week-long lesson in reading during Week 7, groups were given scripts and the task of brainstorming skits to perform them. They were to assign parts, design staging, and choose or create props. The following excerpt from field notes makes clear the expectations for participation and the kinds of opportunities to contribute to classroom literacy practice.

*Camilla:* There will be 4 directors and 4 skits. [Camilla picks directors from those who volunteer] Directors get to choose their cast. There are power words (vocabulary that was considered difficult), like last time, and this time when we do the skits, directors have to come up in front of the audience and explain the power words. [Camilla describes the topic of each play, for example, one is titled “Do Your Share,” another is “The Put-Down Pro,” and a third is “But You Promised.”] She then assigns plays to 4 directors, handing each a collection of scripts. Directors start reading silently. If you'd like to be a narrator, stand up [several students stand]. Juan, pick your narrator. Lester, pick your narrator. Derrick? And Lesley. Narrators and directors, get together... Directors, go ahead and start selecting [your cast]. [Lots of movement, talking ensues, with students lobbying directors to be in their group. Four groups are finally formed.]

*Camilla:* Directors, you are totally responsible for your group... these skits will probably be done for an audience. Okay, so be very in tune to your props that you'll need to make it realistic... Today would be an excellent day, while
you're discussing, to read through it once and find your parts... today you
need to think about costumes, props, read through it. [For the remainder of
the hour, groups practice reading parts, coaching each other on expression,
tone, etc. They also discuss how to place the actors, what they should wear,
lighting. Camilla interacts with each group for a short time at the beginning,
but then leaves them to their work until shortly before time is up, when she
checks to see what props they want.]

Clearly, in the small group activity system that dominated reading instruction, students
had opportunity to influence classroom literacy practices in substantial ways that
could both reproduce and transform traditional practices, including the use of and
production of texts, norms for participation, and the use of students' varied experi-
ence and knowledge. Camilla was not the center of activity and students were able to
contribute actively to building understanding of what they were reading and group
processes. For example, the 'power words' were embedded in the scripts, so their
meaning was determined in context and through negotiation in the groups. The na-
ture of that negotiation, or the norms and values for small group interaction, were
constructed largely by the students because Camilla remained peripheral to their ef-
forts. Students had wide latitude in the ways that they could participate in and con-
tribute to classroom literacy practice.

Because the vast majority of reading instruction was spent in small group work,
the majority of students' activity was characterized by collaborative meaning-
making, bringing text to life through interpretation and negotiation with others, and
connecting text to self and to world. Students said that reading was discussing,
understanding what was read, and reading aloud (focus group interview #2, Week
4). This activity system provided opportunities for students to transform tradi-
tional practice into a focus on active, collaborative meaning making. Such oppor-
tunities provide support for Engeström's (1993) claims that although activity
systems contain some consistency over time, they also contain "inner contradic-
tions... as the source of disruption, innovation, change, and the development
that system". (p. 65)

Summary
Dramatically different goals, values, and division of labor characterized the organiz-
ation of the three activity systems in English versus reading. Reading instruction was
largely community-centered and focused on active meaning making, while English in-
struction was teacher- and text-centered and focused on traditional, more passive
learning. The organization of instructional time into whole class, independent seat-
work, and small group work bracketed the types of activity systems with and within
which students engaged in the construction of classroom literacy practices. The differing time spent in each of the activity systems in reading compared to English was an important structuring element for students' literacy learning, with students being able to appropriate opportunities in reading in increasingly transformative ways because of the increase in small group work. They were able only to reproduce traditional practice in English, given the activity systems that dominated that content area.

Combining the focus on participation in situative learning theories and the CHAT framework's attention to larger institutional goals and norms highlights the mutually constitutive relation between classroom activity and larger institutional and community values. The influence of larger institutional forces is clear in both the abrupt change in nature of time spent in both reading and English in Week 18, as well as in the focus on teacher- and textbook-centered practice. Historical notions of schooling and the relationship of students to teachers and to knowledge are evident in Camilla’s domination of classroom dialogue, her reliance on state-adopted textbooks, and the lack of opportunity for students to collaborate in the orchestration particularly of English instruction. The rearrangement of students’ desks in response to school-wide standardized testing and the push to complete notebooks and workbooks tied to textbooks are also reflective of community and institutional norms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Literate Practice</th>
<th>Social Practice</th>
<th>Pattern of Organization</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading: set the stage to read new story</td>
<td>Camilla reads short poem (Sea Breathes In and Out),</td>
<td>Students sit and listen</td>
<td>Whole class</td>
<td>Text book poem</td>
<td>30 sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher questioning of students to connect poem to previously read story</td>
<td>Students raise hands to share related experience or memory of previous story</td>
<td>Individual in class</td>
<td>Class-constructed connections between prior and new knowledge</td>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting content of new story</td>
<td>Students raise hands to offer prediction</td>
<td>Individual in class</td>
<td>Class-constructed prediction of story content</td>
<td>2 min.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading story and identifying main idea</td>
<td>Alternating reading aloud and teacher questioning</td>
<td>Students are called on to take turns reading paragraphs</td>
<td>Individual in class</td>
<td>Text book story, class-constructed meaning of main idea</td>
<td>21 min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Texts Used and Produced

The ways in which Camilla structured instructional time in the class reflected her broad goals for her students and bounded the possibilities for students’ participation in the instructional activity systems. Because texts proved to be especially important mediating tools, we explored the influence of texts as structural elements in those contrasting activity systems. Transmission and generative functions and authority in text provide ways to describe opportunities available to students to shape classroom practice. To explore function and authority in reading and English, we analyzed the daily data sheets (see Table 3) to categorize text as internally persuasive and generative (IPG) or transmitted and authoritative (TA), using Lotman’s (1988) and Bakhtin’s (1981) definitions. For example, given the nature of students’ engagement with text, whole-class work on filling in answers to workbook questions was designated as transmitted and authoritative; independent seat work on open-ended writing assignments was designated as internally persuasive and generative. Percentage of time spent on IPG versus TA was calculated to explore change over time in students’ interaction with those categories of text (see Figure 2). That analysis illustrates the mediating role of text in the construction of the classroom literacy community.

Figure 2. Percentage of instructional time spent engaging with two categories of text. English instruction was not observed in Week 2.
English Instruction

Figure 2 shows that transmission of meaning and authoritative discourse were the predominant functions of texts in English instruction. In comparison to the pattern in reading, there was more consistent focus on TA text over time. Analysis of the nature of the text within the two categories in English revealed that workbook- and textbook-focused activity and teacher-dominated discussion of the parts of speech (e.g., pronouns, adverbs, adjectives) constituted the TA texts. Students' experience of English was one in which authority was bound to textbooks and workbooks, the meaning of which was to be received intact rather than interpreted. Students worked independently on text- or workbook exercises or were involved in the type of whole-class activity previously presented. For the much less-frequent time spent interacting with IPG text, more than half of that time involved students independently writing essays or poems. Approximately one-third of IPG time was spent in a single small-group activity during one class period, with the remainder in relatively more interactive whole-class discussion sprinkled among the teacher-directed discussions. Thus, TA text was associated with teacher-dominated whole-class or solitary activity focused on textbooks and workbooks. IPG text was associated primarily with solitary work focused on student-created written text. Most consistently, text structured students’ opportunities to participate in the construction of classroom English practices in ways that conformed to traditional teacher-directed, teacher-centered activity focused on print-based materials. Texts in English instruction were important in structuring students’ participation in and contribution to classroom practices in ways that centered on texts as authoritative discourse and on their function in the transmission rather than generation of meaning.

Reading Instruction

In contrast to English instruction, the pattern associated with IPG versus TA text in reading was less consistent (see Figure 2). Also, IPG and TA were both found across all three activity systems. IPG text was associated mostly with small-group activity involving production of graphic representations (e.g., drawing a submersible vehicle as an example of use of diagrams) or shared interpretation and public presentation of text (e.g., skits). However, in Week 4, the vast majority reading instruction was taken up with a small group activity that involved students working together to complete a teacher-constructed instruction packet that accompanied a reading about the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The instructions focused on the text- and workbook, but to complete the activity, students discussed their related prior experiences with the ocean and aquaria and collaborated on answers to the packet questions. This assign-
ment provided a mixture of opportunities to both receive and construct meaning through interaction with text, but was predominantly IPG, given the seemingly more powerful influence of the activity than the content itself. Students cited the fact that they could talk and interact as a critical feature of reading, even in a more prescribed activity like this one. Finally, TA text was found in teacher-centered, textbook-or work-book-focused whole class discussion, small group instruction, and independent work on text- and workbook exercises. In reading, students experienced the dual functions of and authority in text in a wide variety of activities and interactions; their participation in literacy practices in reading was also more varied than in English.

Reading Versus English

The differential structuring of students’ learning in English versus reading based on text function is striking. Lotman’s (1988) notion of authoritative text serving to guarantee that meaning will be transmitted relatively intact may be important to understanding Camilla’s orchestration of English instruction. Her lack of ease and expertise in English may have led her to heightened control and reliance on text- and work-books. She had resources close at hand and control over students’ engagement with the content. Also, she viewed English as a more formulaic, prescribed domain, embracing historical and institutional values that limit the domain to the study of grammar and mechanics. Conversely, Camilla’s comfort with reading may also be understood as a reason she gave students more opportunity to generate meaning, as well as why she gave more control to students as they interacted with and constructed text and meaning. In the skits, they transformed written text into visual and verbal performances, and in the Monterey Bay Aquarium activity, their answers to questions in the instructional packet were co-constructed rather than taken word-for-word from the textbook.

The CHAT framework is informative in examining the connection between local use and production of text and larger institutional forces operating in the classroom. The notion that texts function as mediating structures in Camilla’s pedagogy is supported in Wade and Moje’s (2000) review of research on text use in classrooms. They report that teachers with stronger content backgrounds relied less on textbooks and more on their own prior knowledge and more varied texts. Reflective of a wider belief system in education and society, Camilla’s belief that English is “like math” in being well defined and structured may be another explanation for text function (see Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995, for related research). In addition, her belief that reading is more open-ended reflects the values of the larger education community that views reading
as an act of constructing meaning. Her orchestration of text use and production in both reading and English reflects larger cultural and historical values. Wade and Moje (2000) also report that institutional constraints such as “curriculum guidelines, assessment programs, and text adoption policies control what texts are selected, how they are used in classrooms, and what counts as learning” (p. 613). For Camilla, especially in English, the textbook provided that institutional control. Camilla’s experience with and beliefs about reading versus English, mediated by larger institutional, cultural and historical influences, converged in this classroom so that texts in English functioned largely to support transmission of “official” meaning, while they in reading facilitated students’ generation of meaning.

Summary
Students in this class reported experiencing reading as a rich, individually meaningful subject; they had more authority in defining the practices associated with reading and they drew on a variety of texts (print-based, prior knowledge, group-constructed). Their diverse opportunities across activity systems to influence and participate in reading-focused activity fostered a depth of engagement that they appreciated. In contrast, the practices associated with English led to students’ describing it as a sterile, lifeless subject; across all activity systems, their opportunities to participate and contribute were largely limited to teacher-dominated interactions, and authoritative print-based materials dominated. Their participation largely reproduced teacher-centered practices that hindered their ability to share in the construction of knowledge, meaning, and content. The mutually constitutive relationship between students’ developing literacy knowledge and skills, and classroom contexts and practices is illuminated here by our identification of activity systems and texts as important dynamic structures.

Discussion
The process of assigning text to internally persuasive, generative versus authoritative, transmitted categories pushed our thinking about the interrelations of goals, activity systems, and text. This was especially so when categorization was difficult, when authoritative, transmitted text was the focus of small group activity. Camilla’s goals for participation were strong influences on the activity systems that shaped literacy learning. Students’ goals were also influential, delimiting their appropriation of Camilla’s goals, but they were less powerful in the enactment of activity systems. Larger historical/social community norms for teacher-student relations can be seen as constraining the local power students’ goals had in shaping practice. The three strikingly different
activity systems also bracketed the types of social interactions available. As Cole and Engeström (1993) note,

activity systems such as those that take place in schools and doctors’ offices, for example, appear to reproduce similar actions and outcomes over and over again in a seemingly monotonous and repetitive manner that gives cultural constraints a seemingly overpowering quality. (p. 8)

This was particularly obvious in Camilla’s classroom in the whole-class activity system. However, the small-group activity system provides an example of how local activity can be a source of transformation over time in institutionalized activity, as “tensions, disturbances, and local innovations [that] are the rule and engine of change” (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p. 8) challenged those larger community norms. Within the three activity systems, texts used and produced provided mediating tools for activity, because those texts were varied (including print-based texts, students’ lived experiences, and small-group constructed text), the nature of students’ participation also varied, as well as being markedly different in reading compared to English. In another classroom, the interrelations between goals, activity systems, and text would undoubtedly foster the evolution of a uniquely functioning community. Nevertheless, the elements themselves would, we argue, remain important to structuring the transformation of students’ participation in that community.

Benefits of analyzing participation in classroom communities from situative and CHAT perspectives arise from acknowledging that the construction of knowledge, skills, and content is embedded in social practice. Connecting participation to social practices accomplishes two things. First, it highlights the functional implications and the immediate impacts of the day-to-day, week-to-week classroom routines that shape participation. The manner in which Camilla structured daily and weekly routines shaped students’ opportunities to engage in and contribute to classroom literacy practices, which in turn shaped the meaning of what being a student entailed and their perceptions of and experiences with content.

Second, viewing learning as embedded in social practice also broadens the context of student learning, connecting classroom practices and expectations with the larger society within which classrooms operate. Camilla’s reliance on the state-adopted textbook and the effects of school-wide testing are examples of how the larger society’s goals and expectations for students shape classroom practice. Camilla saw her job as situated within the larger structure of the school system (“I just follow the manual”),


and she communicated the system's expectations for students' learning through her teaching practices and her interactions with students. We see a clear example of the system's influence in Camilla's marked alteration of the evolving patterns in activity systems and use and production of text as a result of school-wide testing and end-of-year pressure to cover content.

Implications

Our close investigation of structuring elements in the classroom context that shaped literacy learning can lend important information to understanding structures underlying positive, transformative, generative classroom literacy communities. As such, this study has implications for issues of teacher preparation and assignment. Camilla's inexperience and discomfort with English had direct influence on the nature of what students learned and their views of the domain. Her assignment to teach in an area that she was unprepared to tackle lead to Camilla's reliance on teacher-proof curricular materials that limited her students' construction of literacy-based knowledge and skills. This implied view of teachers as technicians rather than intellectual leaders reinforces approaches to teacher preparation that privilege a focus on practical, methods-based pedagogy instead of those that stress linking theory and practice to foster students' active engagement in rigorous academic learning. In addition, individual classroom communities develop unique literacy practices as participants interact with local, cultural, and historical influences on curriculum and pedagogy. If teachers are not well-versed in principles and practices of literacy teaching, including critical reflective use of texts and teaching strategies, the outcome is likely to be use of materials, policies, and techniques that have been created without their particular students in mind. By way of contrast, Camilla's preparation and expertise in reading led to her use of a variety of instructional strategies, even within a system that views achievement as success on end-of-year tests. As a result, she was able to engage students in meaningful, rich learning in ways that worked against institutional pressures focused on standardization.

In addition, narrow definitions of literacy may also constrain students' and teachers' construction of literacy as a rich, integrated, complex set of knowledge and skills. In Camilla's class, reading and English were treated as separate, distinct domains, preventing students from integrating the communicative, generative aspects of their unique but complementary functions. Had her teacher preparation program prepared her to teach reading and English within a broader, interdisciplinary definition of literacy as written and verbal communication, expression, and understanding, Camilla
would have been better prepared to engage students in rich, generative learning across content areas, thus forming a more transformative literacy community.

Further Research

Investigations into the ways that students and teachers construct classroom literacy communities has potential to inform our understanding of learning in schools in important ways. For example, questions about the relationship of context and identity can be investigated through examination of the ways in which students’ development of identities as learners is tied to their participation in the construction of classroom literacy practices. Research designs incorporating situative and CHAT frameworks would then concentrate on data and analyses that extend research on discourse, participation, and identity (cf., Rex, 2001) to include individual, interpersonal, and community/institutional structures operating in classroom contexts that mediate individuals’ construction of identity. As Alvermann et al. (1999) assert: “The role of context in shaping our varying and shifting identities provides a link to understanding how we are constituted in language and discourse” (p. 76). Another fertile arena for research focused on mutually constitutive relations between structure, activity and text involves investigating more thoroughly who gets what type of opportunity in terms of the day-to-day routines of the classroom. Such work would involve data and analyses that illuminate the ways in which opportunity to participate emerges related to teachers’ perceptions of students’ and groups of students’ abilities, about what kinds of knowledge and skills are treated as legitimate, and about student-teacher interactions. The strength of a situative/CHAT framework for this type of research would be in its attention to the interplay of local, social, cultural, and historical issues of, for example, race/ethnicity, gender, and social class. These are only several examples of possibilities for future investigation of classroom literacy learning but are illustrative of the promise of the theoretical perspectives used in this study to inform literacy researchers and practitioners.

References


