Constructing Multiple Subjectivities in Classroom Literacy Contexts

Sarah J. McCarthey
The University of Texas at Austin

This study demonstrates the ways in which students in a multi-age, literature-based classroom were continually in the process of constructing and reconstructing their subjectivities based on the demands of the particular social setting. Using different theoretical lenses, I offer a critique of essentialist views of individuals by focusing on three students in a variety of classroom literacy contexts. Each of the three students responded quite differently in each of the settings; their participation was influenced not only by their own gender, social class, and ethnicity and that of the other participants, but also by the task in which they engaged. I argue that each theory adds another layer of interpretation of students' interactions; these interpretations may provide opportunities for developing a more sophisticated approach to multicultural education.

In the process of conducting a year-long, ethnographic examination of teacher and student interactions in a multi-age, literature-based classroom, I was struck by the ways in which several students I was following as case studies responded quite differently in some classroom activities than in others. I decided to examine closely the interactions of particular students on different literacy tasks from several theoretical perspectives in an attempt to account for students' inconsistent interactions. As I tried on different lenses, I found that no single theoretical perspective explained students' actions. Therefore, in this article, I focus on three elementary-age students in different literacy contexts and provide a critique of all essentialist views. I examine the following questions: (a) How are students socially constructed within classroom settings? (b) How do social class, race, ethnicity, culture, and gender influence student interaction? and (c) In what ways might the task and classroom context influence student interaction? By using multiple lenses, I argue that students reconstructed their subjectivities (Dressman, 1997) as they encountered different tasks and changing group compositions. I argue further that viewing students as subjects who construct themselves and are constructed in different ways in different contexts can provide the opportunity to transform current literacy practices.

Theoretical Frames

The concept of the individual as a set of genetically determined or learned traits (e.g., dominance, shyness, creativity) has persisted into twentieth century psychology and has become part of the conventional wisdom about children in western society. For instance, Marilyn Heins, M. D., citing Jerome Kagan in her column about how to handle "shy children," stated, "we used to think that shyness was a learned trait. We now know that extreme shyness has a genetic component. . . And these traits persist. The inhibited infant remains shy" (July 9, 1995, p. G-8). Kagan and Snidman (1988, 1991) have concluded from their data that there is a connection between temperamental characteristics of children and genetics. Trait theory has found its way into school curriculum and teacher training workshops through an emphasis upon "learning styles" (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996) and the wide distribution of "learning styles inventories" (e.g., McCarthy, 1980). These inventories require the test-taker to rate him or herself on a set of preferences, usually opposites, such as "aggressive" versus "shy" resulting in descriptions such as "introvert" versus "extrovert" (American Association of School Administrators, 1991; Milgram, Dunn, & Price, 1993). Implicit in these inventories is the idea that individuals have a set of stable personality traits that are asocial in nature.

In contrast to trait theory, neo-Marxists have suggested that material conditions of production determine the actions of the individual. In a stratified society groups that are politically, socially, and economically in positions of power are able to exert control over institutions and practices, discourse styles, and norms at the expense of others (McCarthy, 1988). Because schools and curricula reproduce dominant ideologies, norms, and oppressive practices, some students (e.g., white, middle-class males) have more access to knowledge than do others (e.g., working-class, Hispanic or African American girls) (Bordieu & Passeron, 1977). Hegemonic relations (forms of authority that operate to maintain differential power positions with the support of individuals within the society) are enacted within individual classrooms. Inequitable power relations are reproduced in the classroom setting. Likewise, some strands of feminist thought claim that inequitable power relations between men and women keep women in subordinate positions. Major criticisms of neo-Marxist and feminist views claim they are overly deterministic, leaving little leeway for individual agency (Feinberg & Soltis, 1985). Further, neo-Marxism is criticized for an exclusive focus on economic reproduction (McCarthy, 1988), while some strands of feminist thought are criticized for focusing solely on gender rather than on the dynamics of race, culture, class, and gender (McCarthy, 1988; Morrow & Torres, 1995).

Challenges to trait theory and neo-Marxist views have come from more interactive theories about the relationship between the individual and the social setting. Drawing from the metaphor of the theater, Goffman (1959) argued that when the individual interacts with others, the definition of the social situation changes. Just as actors assume different roles to play in front of an audience, so do humans act in various ways to guide the impressions of others. While Goffman saw individual actions as intentional, those actions are often determined by an individual's social status. The individual assumes roles depending upon the social situation and the ways in which he or she has been socialized. Goffman contributed extensively to theories about the importance of defining the self in terms of others in the social setting, ascribing individuals' actions to agency and social status. However, Goffman's analysis does not fully explain the dialogic nature of interaction.

Emphasizing the dynamic relation between the individual and the social, social constructivists argue that individuals appropriate cultural norms. Learning, they argue, proceeds from the interpsychological plane (between individuals) to the intrapsychological plane (within an individual) with the assistance of knowledgeable members of the culture (Vygotsky, 1978); moreover, language mediates experience, transforming mental functions (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1985). Harré (1984) posed four phases of the transformative process that suggest a complex interweaving of social conventions and personal transformations: (a) appropriation, in which the individual participates in social practices, (b) transformation, in which the individual takes control over the social appropriation, (c) publication, in which the transformation becomes public, and (d) conventionalization, in which the transformation is reintegrated into social practices. Social constructivists argue that interior processes are modeled on exterior ones (Ingleby, 1986) and that context and tasks are key aspects that influence internalization. Critics, however, find that social constructivists ignore the relationships between power and knowledge, thus failing to account adequately for the influence of gender, social class, and race.

Gee (1990) addresses issues of the relationship between power and knowledge by focusing on language not just as a set of rules for communication, but as an "identity kit" that signals membership in particular groups. Discourses include "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (p. 142). Primary Discourses are learned initially within the home and family, while secondary Discourses are learned from being apprenticed to many groups and institutions. Discourses can be defined in opposition to one another

and subjects can be members of conflicting Discourses. While "public personae" are developed from relationships to secondary Discourses, "personal persona" that come from primary Discourse provide "a sense of unity and identity to our multiple selves (constituted by many secondary Discourses)" (p. 177).

Poststructuralists further emphasize the close relationship between language and identity by replacing the notion of the individual with the concept of the subject: "It is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects" (Belsey, 1980, p. 59). Whereas individuality is the product of nature or biology, "subjectivity is the product of social relations" (Fiske, 1987, p. 49). "The term 'subject' encourages us to think of ourselves and our realities as constructions: the products of signifying or meaning-making activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious" (Orner, 1992, p. 79). Because subjectivity is a social construction, it is "a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another" (Belsey, 1980). Race, social class, and gender are aspects of the multiplicity of social positions that are partial, local, and contingent upon the situation (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). Walkerdine (1990) argues that "the contradictions, the struggle for power, the shifting relations of power, all testify to the necessity for an understanding of subjectivities, not a unique subjectivity" (p. 14). Subjectivities are not the same as roles; in fact, Walkerdine rejects the term "roles" because it invokes a deterministic account of the individual: Whereas roles "can be peeled away like an onion to reveal a repressed core, a true self" (p. 133), subjectivities vary across and within social interactions and are constructed within particular discursive practices.

Although much theorizing from poststructuralist perspectives has occurred, few studies have examined the ways in which students construct their subjectivities in classroom settings (see McKay & Wong, 1996, for an exception). Previous research has focused primarily on students' learning of the norms and patterns of school discourse and the discrepancies between ways of speaking at home and school (see Au, 1980; Heath, 1983). Yet analyzing students' use of language in classroom settings can uncover how students constitute their identities and move literacy educators toward a view of multicultural education that goes beyond essentializing self and culture (Hoffman, 1996). This study examines current classroom literacy practices to demonstrate ways in which students reconstruct their subjectivities within particular contexts. I offer a critique of essentialist views by trying on different theoretical lenses to understand the data. Instead of arguing for one perspective, I argue that each theory adds another layer of interpretation of students' interactions; these interpretations may provide opportunities for developing a more

sophisticated approach to multicultural education, away from stereo-typed views of cultures toward flexible understandings of individuals within changing social contexts.

Language in the Classroom

Researchers of classroom discourse (e.g., Bloome, 1994; Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979) have found that the traditional IRE pattern in which teach-ers initiate, students respond, and teachers evaluate student responses has limited the amount of student interaction. Often the IRE pattern is a mismatch with students from diverse cultural groups who use differing patterns at home (Au, 1993; Heath, 1983); thus, researchers have recom-mended altering traditional discourse patterns to be more inclusive (Cazden, 1988; Jordan, 1985). Discussions that resemble conversations rather than traditional classroom interactions (Nystrand, 1997) and peer work groups (Meloth, 1991) seem to provide students with increased opportunities to construct knowledge. For example, Barnes and Todd (1977) found that students were able to negotiate new understandings of text when arranged in small groups. Students in peer-led groups were more substantively engaged than in teacher-led groups and were more likely to craft new interpretations based on others' ideas (Almasi, 1995).

Advocates of literature-based instruction emphasize the power of small groups to encourage reflection and dialogue about texts (Harste & Short, 1991) and to engage in literate thinking (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Through small-group discussion, students are able to synthesize information, address important themes, and use a range of ways to respond (McMahon & Raphael, 1994). Diverse learners can gain insights about text from each other as peers take on the roles of more knowledge-able others (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995).

Yet many researchers have underestimated the political nature of these peer arrangements, missing opportunities to point out how social rela-tions from the larger society may be reproduced in small groups (Lensmire, 1994). Variations in students' learning have been attributed to students' abilities to generate knowledge relevant to the task (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1993). Evans (1993) found that more popular students assumed leadership roles within small groups. Floriani (1994) found that pairs of students with shared local histories were more likely to work on the content of a text than those without shared histories who spent more time negotiating roles and relationships. However, little research has examined students in different literacy contexts while taking into consid-eration the ways in which the nature of the task, the classroom context, gender, social class, and race all influence peer interactions.

Method

I examined the literacy events within a team-taught, third-fourth grade classroom in a southwestern city for an entire school year. The classroom reflected the cultural diversity within the school with 57% Hispanic, 39% European American, and 4% African American students; 64% of the students were on free or reduced lunch. Audiotaped classroom observations of large and small group interactions were the primary source of data for this study. I also conducted several interviews throughout the year about perceptions of literacy activities with the teachers, four formal interviews outside the classroom setting with each of the focal students, and one interview with a parent of each student.

Classroom Context

This was the second year that the two teachers, Missy and Amy, had taught together; they decided to become a team when the school moved to a multi-age grouping plan because the changes in grouping were accompanied by flexibility to develop innovative, curricular units. They drew from whole language experts and from their colleagues across the hall in developing integrated units. The school day generally began with students' writing in their personal journals and ended with stories read aloud. Interspersed throughout the day were literacy activities such as research, writers' workshop, and writing articles for the weekly class newspaper.

 The teachers selected a lengthy piece, usually a children's novel, that became the focus of a unit of study (from 2-12 weeks). Central to each unit was book response time in which the teachers read aloud from a book and students responded. Each day, all 47 students gathered together on the rug to listen to a chapter read aloud by one of the teachers. While one teacher read aloud, the other teacher wrote a summary of the events. Students then had five to seven minutes to respond in an open-ended way to the chapter. The emphasis was on students' putting down their ideas without concern for spelling or punctuation. Sharing response logs followed the uninterrupted writing time. About six to ten students volunteered to read their responses aloud. Either or both teachers commented on student work, focusing on students' use of vocabulary words from the book in their own writing and the inclusion of interesting details. The teachers believed it was important for students to hear fellow students' ideas because they could learn from others; however, formal peer responses were not part of the routine and teachers did not elicit comments from other students.

   The large group response sessions were tightly controlled by the teachers and tended to be dominated by a few students who volunteered to

read regularly. The read-aloud formats were characterized by the common initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) recitation pattern identified by Mehan (1979). The teachers focused on vocabulary development and comprehension of the story and often asked closed questions, calling on students until the desired response was given. During the sharing of students' responses, the first few minutes were characterized by students' attentiveness, but as more students shared many of the listeners became disengaged and were often scolded or reminded to pay attention.

As a result of their concern that student interest was waning and that the same students were volunteering to read all the time, the teachers decided to vary the way in which they were conducting book response time when they began the new unit on Ancient Egypt in January. The major change was to alternate small group formats with the whole group sessions to invite wider student participation.

Each teacher was assigned a group of students who were technically in her home room. However, the teachers had combined their student population, their physical surroundings, and their resources to team-teach. For example, they made one large classroom out of their two adjoining rooms and involved all 47 students in most activities. Occasionally, the two homeroom classes were divided for a particular activity. For example, Missy's class worked on writer's workshop while Amy's class engaged in a follow-up reading activity. However, the majority of the literacy-related activities took place either at the rug on one side of the adjoining rooms or on the other side which contained nine tables of four to six students.

The teachers assigned students to sit at one of the tables with other children for three to four weeks. They stayed with the same group for all group or individual work until the teachers reorganized the groups. Each group was allowed to come up with a team name that lasted for the duration of the arrangement. These groups were heterogeneous in terms of ability, grade level, ethnicity, and gender. Teachers made decisions about group membership based on which students they thought would get along well, providing opportunities for older or higher-performing students to come to the assistance of others, and maintaining heterogeneity of ability. They moved students frequently to allow them to get to know other students and to solve personality problems that might have developed within teams. Generally, students were not assigned as group leaders on specific tasks; instead, all students were expected to participate more or less equally. The greatest challenge for the teachers was that six students were pulled out in the course of the school day for special education or for help in reading at four different times. Hence, they found it difficult to develop a stable group of students who had all heard the chapter read aloud during small group discussions.

Student Participants

Over the course of the school year, I collected data on the overall class-
room norms and patterns of interaction and followed four students as
cases. Two of the students were Hispanic and two were European
American. Initially, I knew very little about students' social class back-
grounds but later determined their class membership through descrip-
tions of occupations of parents and first-hand observations of the homes
and neighborhoods in which they resided. From the set of observations
and interviews involving these students, I selected Rosa, Matthew, and
Andy to analyze further because I had a larger data set from which to
draw. They also represented differing levels of academic achievement:
Andy was considered by his teachers to be a high-achieving student;
Rosa was an average student; and Matthew, labeled learning disabled,
struggled with reading and writing, needing additional help through the
Resource room.

Data Collection and Analysis

Sources of data included interviews, observations, and classroom arti-
facts. I drew upon interviews with teachers, students, and parents to pro-
vide information about perceptions of classroom activities and students'
lives. The major source of data for this article came from close observa-
tions of classroom interactions over the course of the three-month Egypt
unit. Students' journals and classroom artifacts such as worksheets and
assignments were also collected to provide contextual information about
classroom tasks and students' work.

Interviews

I conducted five interviews with one or both of the teachers. The first
interview in September was conducted individually with each of the
teachers and focused on their professional biographies and curricular
goals for the school year. The second interview took place at the end of
October and was conducted with both teachers at the same time. The
focus was on reviewing literacy instruction from the past two and a half
months, discussing upcoming curricular goals and eliciting their percep-
tions of the particular case study students. I interviewed the teachers
separately at the end of February where we focused on the particular
tasks and literacy instruction that had been part of the Egypt unit.
During this interview I brought copies of transcripts and asked the teach-
ers to comment on their impressions of interactions. In April I conduct-
ed an interview with both teachers, reviewing their goals and accom-
plishments over the year. The most informative interview occurred dur-
ing the summer when I brought audio tapes and transcripts of events I

had selected to the home of one of the teachers, Amy (Missy was not available). Together, we listened repeatedly to the tapes, identifying students' voices, clarifying words, and editing the transcripts. Then I asked the teacher to provide her interpretations of the group interactions and posed follow-up questions.

Student interviews were conducted four times throughout the year for about thirty minutes. Each interview focused on activities, tasks, and literacy experiences occurring both at home and school within the previous two months. Questions were designed to reflect the recent activities in which they had engaged. One-hour interviews with parents were conducted in the homes; parents were asked to describe their children as well as to provide information about home and school literacy experiences.

Observations

Although I collected data throughout the school year, I have chosen to focus on the three-month-long Egypt unit in this article. In this period the curriculum was the most varied, and the teachers continually developed new activities for their unit. During this unit they also decided to revise their expectations for book response time. From over 35 audiotaped observations of one to three hours in duration, I transcribed verbatim all interactions that involved the focal students. These interactions represented a range of response activities including students'(a) reading their responses to the whole class; (b) reaching consensus in a small group about a teacher-constructed question related to a picture book; (c) sharing their journal responses with a small group; (d) creating questions to be used for their quiz show, *Jeopardy!*, in a small group; and (e) generating lists for the "afterlife." As I began my analysis I noticed that the focal students acted differently depending on the context. As I continued to see this pattern, I then selected illustrative events that provided opportunities to view the students in a variety of group compositions performing different types of tasks.

Some of these events represented a larger class of recurring interactions. For example, the teachers read aloud from the books on a daily basis, asking questions and allowing students to interject comments; the recurring nature of this activity allowed me to see how the case study students responded in a large group setting over time. Some of the events represented a particular kind of task that took place several times weekly for about a month with the small groups intact; the group consensus and small group read-alouds were examples of tasks that allowed me to see students in different settings over a period of a few weeks. Still other events such as the *Jeopardy!* game and afterlife tasks reflect one-time activities; the limited time frame provided opportunities to view students as they performed activities the teachers considered creative and that allowed students to use their knowledge gained from reading the texts.

Using the verbatim transcriptions of the selected events, I then insert-
ed conventions adapted from Tannen (1984) to provide contextual infor-
mation about the conversational exchanges among students. Short paus-
es are indicated by single periods, whereas longer pauses are indicated in
parentheses. Overlapping talk is indicated by the use of a dash (—). Words
that were emphasized are italicized. Prosodic cues such as tone, pitch, and
pace are indicated in brackets where relevant. Both the content of the talk
and the ways in which speakers interacted were analyzed. For example,
turn allocation can provide some information about who appears to dom-
inate the conversations; speakers holding the floor frequently for long
periods of time or who interrupt others are considered to be dominating
the talk (West & Zimmerman, 1983). However, Tannen (1993) argues that
context, styles of interaction, and content all need to be considered. With
this consideration in mind, I examined the discourse for patterns of dom-
inance and reticence using context and content cues including turn allo-
cation, what was said, and how it was said.

After analyzing the conversations to understand the participation pat-
terns of the focal student, I applied several different theoretical lenses to
understand why those patterns occurred. For example, I attempted to
understand the teachers' points of view and found that they were some-
what aligned with personality or trait theory. I then attempted to widen
the possible interpretations by applying neo-Marxist and feminist inter-
pretations that emphasize race, class, and gender. Additionally, I drew
from social constructivist theory to understand the role of context, par-
ticularly as it played out in group composition, task definition and inter-
pretation, and classroom conventions. When considering features such
as context, group composition, and task I want to argue that these were
not immutable, but rather shifted subtly over the duration of the
exchanges as students were continually interpreting the task and context.
Some conversational exchanges lent themselves to particular theoretical
perspectives better than others, so rather than presenting all the possible
interpretations of each excerpt, I have selected the most plausible, though
sometimes competing explanations.

Results

The following section focuses on three students engaged in different lit-
eracy tasks in several contexts. Following each description of the student
is an analysis of excerpts from classroom interactions. The analyses are
derived from different theoretical positions, intended to provide a lay-
ered interpretation of events.

Rosa

A Hispanic fourth-grader, Rosa lived in an apartment with her mother, father, and a younger brother and sister for whom she had some responsibility for care. Her parents both worked for the IRS, her father full-time during the day and her mother during the evening shift. This arrangement allowed the parents to share the child care responsibilities for the younger children. Rosa's parents had graduated from high school and moved to the city from a small, rural town on the United States / Mexico border when they married. Rosa reported that she spoke English at home; however, her mother said that Spanish was spoken between the parents, although they spoke to the children frequently in English and occasionally in Spanish at home.

Rosa's mother described her daughter as "very shy" and went on to explain, "I was very shy. I guess that's why my kids are shy now." Another reason she had suggested for her children's shyness was that "my kids have never been in day care so they're real close to me; they're real attached to me. I've always been home so it's kind of difficult for them to go to school. Rosa had the same problem." Her mother saw Rosa as "very helpful" and said "she is a real good kid. Of all three, she has the more moderate personality. My other ones are headstrong and she's not." These perceptions of shyness and helpfulness seemed to be shared by Rosa's classroom teachers.

In the beginning of the year, one of her teachers described Rosa as "real shy. . . solemn and kind of sad." She found that Rosa did not volunteer to read her quick writes aloud to the whole class and did not speak unless she was called upon: "She's one of those kids who is really quiet; she doesn't demand a lot of attention from you because she's not a behavior problem and she's not one of those outgoing extroverts that are constantly raising their hands." In my observations during the course of the school year, Rosa did not ever volunteer to read her work aloud. This reticence seemed to support the view of Rosa as having a shy personality. However, during small group interactions Rosa's response patterns varied.

Small Group Consensus Task

The teachers' rationale for the consensus task came from their own experiences participating in small groups and their expectations for what was necessary for students to be successful later on in life. Amy stated, "Life isn't always easy. There are challenges and sometimes you're working with a group of people and you all have to come up with one answer. And you have to learn to compromise or you have to find some way in which everyone is going to be pleased with the answer that is given." The questions for the discussion groups originally came from an already

prepared unit on the novel, *The Egypt Game*, but later on the teachers generated the questions themselves.

On the particular occasion presented below the teachers had read aloud a picture book called *Zekmet, the Stone Carver*. The task required students to discuss and achieve consensus in response to the question: Why do you think Zekmet treated Hotep poorly? At the end of the session students were to write in their individual journals the answer upon which they had agreed. Rosa's peers were Edward, a European-American, middle-class boy; Sharon, a working-class, Hispanic girl; and José, a middle-class, Hispanic boy. (Students' ethnicity was determined by which box the parents marked on the enrollment form. Social class status was determined through free lunch status and parents' employment. Students' first language was determined through discussions with the teachers.)

Three students had provided their opinions of why Zekmet treated Hotep poorly; Rosa had not yet spoken prior to this exchange:

José: I think he's *greedy*
Edward: But.
José: Now *who* is he?
Edward: OK, everybody said something except Sharon, I mean Rosa. He said he thinks Hotep is *greedy*. (long pause, inaudible background noise) So *which* one do we want to go with?
Sharon: Well, I didn't *hear*.
Edward: Well, *mine* is practically the same thing as you did. Cause he *treated* him bad. [Teacher asks who needs more time for discussion. Edward offers that their group needs more time.]
           So *who* thinks that me and Sharon's is good?
Sharon: Remember, *everybody* has to have a turn.
Edward: Everybody has *gotten* a turn [speaking louder.]
José: *Rosa* hasn't.
Edward: *Yes*, she has.
José: She has? I didn't *hear*.
Sharon: *Neither* did I.
Edward: You *have*?
Rosa: I don't *know*.
Edward: I guess she *hasn't* then. Come *on*. [drawn out]
José: Hey, batter, batter, batter.
Edward: You had *all* the time to think in the world.
José: I feel like going to [inaudible]
Others: Hey, yeah. [laughter]
Rosa: I think what *José* does.

One interpretation of the interaction is that Rosa is shy and acquiescent: She did not initiate responses but answered only when called upon. When asked if she had given an answer, she responded that she did not know and then agreed with a view that had already been given. The teacher seemed to view Rosa as shy when she offered the interpretation

that "Rosa did not say much at all. I think that is Rosa's nature—she is pretty quiet." When I asked the teacher how she would account for the group interactions, she noted Edward's domination and attributed the dynamics of the interaction to the individual personalities of group members:

> Edward is a very vocal person; no matter what we are doing he is vocal. He is used to being heard. That is not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom, playing on the playground. He is used to others' looking at him as a leader. He is used to taking charge. He has a strong personality, whereas Rosa's personality, she is less likely to dominate a conversation or come up with an idea because she is more willing to sit back and listen to what other people have to say and be happy with someone else's idea rather than express her own. I don't think she is as self-confident as Edward is.

The teacher attributed differences in students' contributions to personality traits such as leadership and self-confidence. The teacher's and mother's views, informed by extended experiences with the children, are aligned with personality theorists who account for differences in behavior in terms of internal traits. However, other interpretations complicate the view of Rosa as only shy.

When the dynamics are examined from a neo-Marxist perspective, issues of race, class, and gender are highlighted (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lewis & Simon, 1986). Edward, a middle-class, white male, seemed to control the discourse in this small group, silencing Rosa, a working-class, Hispanic female. He appeared to control the floor by taking more turns than others (8 of the 20 total turns), speaking loudly, challenging José when he said that Rosa had not had a turn, and urging Rosa to come up with an answer. Rosa's Hispanic peers, José and Sharon, pointed out that Rosa had not offered her perspective and attempted to facilitate her entry into the conversation. Her peers may have assisted her because they were aware of the classroom rule that everyone was supposed to give his or her opinion and/or because they may have assisted her as an act of resistance to the dominating, white male (cf. Giroux, 1988). Under pressure from Edward, who expressed that she has had "all the time to think in the world," Rosa tried to get a space in the conversation but was unsuccessful, agreeing with José perhaps to move the conversation forward or to challenge Edward.

From a materialist (i.e., neo-Marxist) view Rosa's identity as a working-class, Hispanic female strongly influenced how she interacted with her peers. The logic of this point of view is that larger societal patterns of economic and social reproduction have manifested themselves in the small group interaction. As a working-class, Hispanic girl, Rosa was not comfortable speaking up in a setting in which a white male tended to domi-

nate. However, like personality theory the materialist point of view needs to be interrogated; the categories of race, class, and gender can be as constraining as personality theory in understanding students' interactions in the scene just described. For example, I cannot be certain that Rosa agreed with José because he was Hispanic as opposed to his having an idea that Rosa really liked. Other small group interactions provide opportunities to see Rosa as a dynamic, complex subject rather than a personality type or an example of an ethnic or gender category.

The *Jeopardy!* Game

The purpose of the *Jeopardy!* game was to allow students to be creative and to demonstrate their understanding of concepts associated with life in Ancient Egypt. The teachers provided a brief explanation of how *Jeopardy!* was played on TV and then explained that different groups of students were to generate questions for the class game. Students were assigned to write questions in a *Jeopardy!* format, categories were assigned to small groups by the teachers (e.g., "everyday life," "gods and goddesses," "pyramids," and the book, *The Egypt Game*), and the respondents were to give their answers in question format, (e.g., The country in which the Nile River is located: What is Egypt?).

One group consisted of Rosa; Dana, a middle-class Hispanic girl; Rosario, a middle-class Hispanic girl; and Matthew, a working-class Hispanic boy who had difficulties reading and writing. They were assigned to generate questions about the book, *The Egypt Game*. At the beginning of this segment Matthew had his jacket over his head, and the girls discussed appropriate questions:

Dana: *Where*, where was the Egypt Game *located*?
Rosario: Located in the *casa* [inaudible]
Dana: *No, no, no, no.*
Rosario: It was *Egypt*. It was located in *Egypt*.
Rosa: It can't *be*, [inaudible] like the professor's *backyard*.
Rosario: *Yeah*, the professor's backyard.
Dana: That is not a *hard* question.
Rosa: That *is* a hard one.
Rosario: Who was the king of *England*?
[Students laugh.]
Rosa: That has nothing to *do* with it.
Dana: Yeah.

In this group interaction Rosa appears more verbal than in the previous interaction. Even though she took only 3 turns, she initiated responses, commenting on others' responses and even actively disagreeing with her peers. The three girls disagreed, joked with one another, and kept each other on task. Turn allocation was more equal than in the previous excerpt as turns were almost equally distributed among the girls (4 for

Dana, 4 for Rosario, and 3 for Rosa). When asked about Rosa's increased participation, the teacher responded:

> Rosa is participating more because she feels more comfortable. I think it has to do with the fact that Rosario and Dana speak Spanish and Rosa feels more comfortable with that. She is not as intimidated by the girls as she is by Edward. I think probably Dana and Rosario are more accepting of her ideas and more willing to listen, whereas Edward was very dominating. . . . Had she been in a group with Rachel or Melissa, or even a boy, not Henry who is like Edward, very strong personality. . . someone more accepting and willing to listen rather than push her ideas aside. I think she is more than willing to open up.

The teacher saw the influence of language and group composition as contributing factors in students' participation even though she tended to view students as having certain personality types. Her reference to "language" may have been a proxy for culture or ethnicity (since Rosa's first language was English and the other two girls' first language was Spanish).

The neo-Marxist and feminist lenses focus attention on how gender, social class, and ethnicity might play a role in influencing Rosa's interactions. Since no white males were present, Rosa did not have to compete for the floor. Rosa interacted with the two other Hispanic girls, generating questions, disagreeing at times, and even ignoring the male who had difficulties reading and writing.

However, the difference in task, a factor emphasized by social constructivists, also appeared to affect the interaction. Rosa participated in the task that was more open-ended, generating questions of student choice, rather than the task in which students had to reach consensus. Rosa's interview response seemed to provide credence for both the task's and group composition affecting her. She said that group discussions that required consensus were difficult because "It takes too long to agree on one answer" and she preferred other settings where "Nobody would be arguing and telling that's the wrong answer or 'no, we can't write that.'" Consideration of social class, gender, and race as well as an examination of the task in a particular setting enlarge the ways in which Rosa's interaction patterns can be analyzed.

Small Group Read Alouds

One of the tasks after reading picture books was for students to take turns reading aloud their response logs and then discuss whatever topics they wanted related to the book. Although the teachers did not explicitly model sharing or responding, they did discuss with the students what constituted effective discussions: "being good listeners," "showing appro-

priate body language," and "giving everyone a turn." Students established round robin formats to read their work aloud, and, generally, little discussion of what had been read ensued.

The group responding to the book about artifacts from Ancient Egypt consisted of the same group as in the previous excerpt: Rosa, Rosario, Dana, and Matthew. In this group Dana claimed leadership by calling on people to read aloud. When it was Matthew's turn and he seemed to struggle with reading the teacher's handwritten dictation of his response, Rosa went over to him and prompted him. She inserted words when he paused but did not take over the reading.

> Matthew: [reading haltingly]: "If I was the water boy, I would not" (pause)
> Rosa: [supplies]: "Wait."
> Matthew: [continues]: "wait till"
> (pause)
> Rosa: "to tell Howard Carter."
> Matthew: "If I"
> Rosa (to Matthew): Where are you?
> Matthew: [to Rosa] I don't know. [continues reading] "If I was the water-boy I would wait until the last minute to tell Howard Carter and make him very mad. I"
> Rosa: "Then"
> Matthew: "If he asked me why did you tell me later maybe I didn't want to. Then"
> (pause)
> Rosa: "Howard Carter was in the tomb"
> Matthew: "In the tomb I would go. He, Howard Carter was in the tomb in another room. I would sneak in and look under one of the guard's dress and see what I could find. I would want to find [pause] a diamond or a papyrus."

In this setting Rosa assumed the role of a tutor, prompting and assisting when necessary but not dominating (see Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1978). Whereas she, along with the other girls, had ignored Matthew's contributions during the *Jeopardy!* game, she was quite willing to assist Matthew in reading his work aloud. Her goal appeared to be to assist him rather than to bring attention to his difficulty in reading and writing. Whereas personality theory suggests that she was exhibiting helpful traits, a characteristic emphasized by her mother, a social constructivist theory focuses on the group composition and task. Being in a more cooperative group and having the opportunity to provide assistance with a task in which she was skilled were important aspects of the context that influenced Rosa's interactions in this view.

Summary

While Rosa acted shy in the first excerpt in which she was called upon to produce an answer, she was more responsive in other settings. In the

first setting she was in a group where there was a dominating person who was white and male. Further, the teachers' expectations that students would achieve consensus and Rosa's difficulty with a close-ended task most likely influenced her lack of responsiveness. In the second setting she was surrounded by Hispanic girls with whom she may have perceived she had much in common. The task was a more open-ended one of generating questions and there was less time pressure to construct answers. In the third setting she volunteered to help Matthew. The teacher, Amy, had already established classroom norms that suggested it was acceptable for a person assuming the role of teacher to provide assistance to Matthew. Further, she could perform a task at which she was competent: reading. At the same time Rosa is a working-class, Hispanic girl who brought life experiences shaped by racial, class, and gender constructs to the various situations. At times those constructs were more salient than others—for example, being in a group with Hispanic girls seemed to be a different experience from being in a more mixed group where the dominating person was white and male.

While each of the competing theories accounts for Rosa's interactions in different ways, none of the theories fully explains why she responded differently in various settings. Rather than exhibiting only the qualities of shyness and helpfulness described by her mother and teacher, Rosa seemed to be responding differently depending on the context (which was continually shifting), task, and group composition. A theory of social and economic reproduction does not fully account for why she was assertive in some settings but much less so in other situations. The ways in which she interpreted the tasks seemed to influence her interactions as well. For example, she seemed to see the *Jeopardy!* task as one requiring her to generate responses, whereas the read-aloud format provided her the opportunity to assist Matthew. Each of the theoretical perspectives provides another lens to understand Rosa's actions, complicating the view of her. Likewise, the picture that emerges of Matthew is equally complex.

Matthew

Like Rosa, Matthew was from a Hispanic, working-class family. He lived in a small rented home with his mother, his mother's ten-year old sister, and his mother's fiancé. His mother worked as an assistant direct care worker in a psychiatric facility and her fiancé worked as an operations manager for a moving company. Matthew's mother received her GED after giving birth to Matthew at a young age and worked a second job several nights a week to supplement her income.

His mother described Matthew as "a real curious kid which is cool and he is real open to new things." One of his teachers described him as,

"hyper, but he's a good kid." He participated in some classroom activities but did not participate in others because he was at Resource where he received individual help in reading and writing; he had particular difficulties in decoding text and in writing words and sentences. His classroom teachers provided examples of when Matthew had solved logic problems easily, believing that he had "good comprehension and great recall. . . and great oral vocabulary." His teacher reported that the Resource teacher thought Matthew was "one of the brightest, yet most disabled students he has."

Sometimes Matthew was present for "book response time." During the interactions surrounding the reading aloud of texts, Matthew often asked questions and provided answers to teachers' questions. For example, when a teacher read aloud a book about King Tut's Tomb, Matthew asked questions about Tut such as, "Was he 19 or 17?" When coming across the word "intact" in her reading about the tomb, the teacher repeated the word and asked for a definition. Matthew volunteered, was called upon, and his answer was accepted:

> Teacher: Intact. What does that mean to be discovered intact?
> Matthew: Nothing was stolen.
> Teacher: OK, nothing was taken away.

Because Matthew had difficulty writing his ideas down on paper during the writing time, one of the teachers (Amy) assisted him through dictation—Matthew told her his ideas and she wrote them on paper. Matthew often volunteered to read his work aloud to the class when he was present. At the beginning of the year the teacher read his work; near the end of the year he read his own. His work was accepted by the other students, and he seemed pleased with their reactions. It appears that by singling Matthew out and spending writing time with him, the teacher provided opportunities for him to express his ideas and to participate in the whole group sessions. Amy believed that he was bright and that she was enabling him to demonstrate his abilities through collaborative writing. She described Matthew in the following way:

> He doesn't miss a beat, he really doesn't. He's very, very bright. I don't know how much reading goes on at home. I know that he hangs on your every word whenever you read. He loves to listen to you. He has really good comprehension and great recall. For novel time, he can't write unless you spell everything for him then he can write it. . . . He says it verbally and I just write it down and it works well with him. And like I said he's pretty bright and he knows what's going on in the story and he likes to add a little humor to it also.

Matthew seemed to believe that the teacher's efforts were successful. When asked how he felt about the teacher's writing for him, he responded,

"I'm still learning so I didn't really mind." He felt that he was becoming a better writer because he could "write a little faster."

In the large group settings Matthew's identity centered around his contributions to discussions; his disability was highlighted during the writing sessions because the teacher wrote down his dictations but otherwise did not seem to be a salient factor. Matthew was not quite so successful in the small group settings, however. During the *Jeopardy!* game task in which Rosa became an active participant, Matthew's contributions were continually ignored.

The *Jeopardy!* Game

This vignette is taken from the same interaction previously described with Rosa as the focal point. In this sequence, which occurred just after Rosa had contributed ideas, Matthew tried to enter the conversation at several points, but was continually ignored:

Matthew:	Who was the *first* one, who was the *first* one to *make* up the *Egypt game*— [tries to talk over others] [overlapping talk]
Dana:	I know a *better* one. I know a *better* one. *Rosario*, I know a better one—
Rosario:	What?
Dana:	Who was the first *person* to introduce [inaudible] in the *chapter*?
Rosa:	*Huh*?
Rosario:	Who was the first one to *what* you call it, *begin* the Egypt Game? It was *April*.
Matthew:	I said *that*—
Rosario:	*No*, you *didn't*. I said that before *you*.
Rosa:	You said *how* did the Egypt Game *begin*.
Matthew:	*Yeah* I meant like the *game* game [a character in the book invents a game]
Rosa:	I can't *do* this.
Rosario:	Just write the *question*. *You* write the question. *Somebody* write the question.
Rosa:	What *was* the question?
Dana:	*Who* was the first *person*, who was the first person to begin the Egypt Game [says it slowly with emphasis so it can be written]?

At this point, Matthew seemed to become quite discouraged because he covered his head with his shirt. A few minutes later he placed his folder over his head. When the teacher noticed this, she came over and asked if Matthew was participating: "Are you going to let Matthew ask a question?" Matthew spoke up to defend his participation saying, "I've been" to which the teacher responded, "You have a lot of information in your folder." The conversation continued and, when Rosario forgot the octopus's name, Matthew provided it ("Security"), but was not given credit:

Rosario: *Who* found—
Rosa: Who *found*—
Rosario: What was that *octopus's name*?
Matthew: Who found *Security* [the octopus]?
Dana: Who found *Security*?
Rosario: You gave the *answer* to what you call it.
Dana: *Marshall* [a character in the story].
Rosario: *No*, he didn't. *Toth* [a god] did because he gave him a *letter* saying
           where he *was*.
Dana: The *professor hid* it.
Rosario: *They* wrote a letter, they wrote a *letter* to *Toth whatever* his name
           was,
Matthew: They wrote a letter to *Toth*
Rosario: Then Marshall went in there and *looked* for it.
Dana: *Marshall* found Security.
Rosa: I am trying to write the *question*.
Rosario: Toth *did* because he is the one who wrote the question. Yeah but
           you already *wrote* that.
Matthew: T-o-o-o-th (in a sing-song voice as the others are speaking)
Rosa: It was the *professor* wrote it, don't you *remember*?
Rosario: *OK, OK*, I got the *point*.

Matthew seemed both to try to gain authority and to undermine the
group by speaking directly into the microphone of the tape recorder,
making noises, and saying, "Toth did not do it" repeatedly. The three
girls continued the discussion about the name of the professor's wife
with Matthew attempting to contribute but being cut off. In the mean-
time the teachers provided some examples to the whole class of hard
questions and encouraged students to do the same. Matthew attempted
another suggestion:

Matthew: I know, *who* was the person [slowly] to solve the *mystery*? [quick-
           ly, in an excited voice]
Rosa: *What* mystery?
Matthew: The mystery of *who*—
Rosario: *Really, really, really, really hard question* [emphasis on each word]
           (pause) Somebody think of a hard, *hard* question.
Dana: Um—
Rosa: *Who* gots the brains here? *You* do [pointing to Dana].

The other students tried to think of questions that started with "where"
or "when." Matthew persisted and initiated one last idea:

Matthew: You know *what*, you said you were looking at the King of *England*,
           it was on *there*—
Rosa: *Oh, oh, oh*. Where was Security *found*?
Dana: Where was *what*?
Rosa: Where was Security *found*?
Matthew: I said *that*.
Dana: Where was Security *found*?
Rosario: In the tomb of *Isis*.
Dana: *Where*?

Rosario: In the tomb of [slowly] the *evil* one.
           [inaudible]
Dana: *Yeah*, that's a *good* one. That's a *good* one.
Rosario: I *thought* of it.
Matthew: You know when she *said* who was the King of *England*. . .

Matthew seemed to give up on contributing and began to blow on his paper, finally getting Rosario's attention. She stared at him, apparently in an effort to get him to stop. Matthew did not attempt to participate any longer and the session ended a few minutes later.

Although Matthew took a number of turns (11 of 50), the girls often ignored Matthew's contributions and began to discuss other questions and ideas. On the occasion Rosa picked up on Matthew's suggestion about the mystery, the topic was quickly changed. He often tried to take credit for ideas given but was rarely acknowledged. One interpretation of why the group ignored Matthew is that he was perceived by the members as a disabled reader and writer who kept them off-task. Thus his peers generalized to seeing him as lacking any academic skills related to the task and ignored his ideas (Cohen, Kepner, & Swanson, 1995). The teacher did not accept this view of Matthew, however, believing that he was quite capable. She felt that his body language did not communicate participation and interest, and thus he was misinterpreted by his peers. After hearing the tape, the teacher had the following response:

> I like the way the students were interacting except for the fact they seemed to leave Matthew out quite a bit. Those three were pretty close knit but they were on task all the time. They were a little silly now and then but that is fine, that does not bother me. I think the reason why they don't include Matthew because a lot of times he is doing things and looking like he is not paying attention, but whenever you read through this you notice he is listening and he is picking up what they are saying. Every once in a while when he thinks it is important enough he will put something in. A lot of time Matthew's body language does not give the impression he is listening.

When examining the dynamic through a feminist lens to consider gender influences, it seems that the three girls were seizing the opportunity to gain solidarity with one another against the only boy in the group. They accepted, extended, and argued over each others' ideas and continually ignored Matthew's contributions or did not give him credit even when they appeared to use his ideas. Matthew's reaction was alternately to try to participate, resist, and then to give up. When asked how he liked small groups, he responded that he did not like the group he was in because of a girl "who's mean, she bosses people around."

Yet this explanation does not fully account for why Matthew's contributions were so systematically ignored. Many factors seemed to impinge

upon the interaction, including the immediate context as well as Matthew's past literacy experiences. Matthew was at a disadvantage because he had not been present for all of the book response sessions because he attended Resource. His opportunities to provide information were somewhat restricted—because he was not able to write well, he could not take on the role of the recorder. Much of the activity and conversation took place around the person who was writing down students' ideas. Sitting on the other side of the table from the recorders, Matthew had restricted access to what questions were actually recorded. Thus, he did not have as many resources as the girls, not having heard all of the chapters and not being close to where the questions were recorded. This latter explanation adds important contextual elements to the picture that emerges of Matthew. The excerpts presented below which show Matthew in large group settings further complicate the view of him. Whereas Matthew was not successful in the small group *Jeopardy!* game setting, he seemed to be quite successful in settings where the teacher was present to assist with the reading and writing tasks.

Lists for the Afterlife

The task of generating lists for the afterlife came from a packaged unit on Egypt and allowed students to connect an Egyptian practice with their own lives. The teachers introduced the activity by saying that just as King Tut took items to the afterlife with him, they could think about what was important to take with them after death. The teachers instructed students that they would need to think about items that would make their lives better and that they needed to provide reasons for their choices. Missy provided an example of taking a good book, and Amy said she would take the quilt her grandmother made in case it was cold and because it held sentimental value for her. Missy explained to the students that their lists would be displayed by their drawn sarcophagi and read by visitors, "so don't make it a silly list or a frivolous list." The activity began with teachers obtaining input from the whole class and then moving to students filling the page out independently.

During this session in which students were to generate lists of what to take with them in the afterlife, Matthew gained recognition from his peers. As the teachers were demonstrating to the entire class on the overhead how to set up their lists, Matthew entertained the peers at his table by suggesting he would bring "video games" and "vampire teeth" to which his peers laughed. Upon hearing the laughter, one of the teachers called on him to tell the class what he would take. Matthew responded "pizza" and "food"; members of the class laughed (they seemed to appreciate the way he was saying it as much as the items themselves). When the teacher asked why he would take those items, Matthew

responded, "Because it tastes good and if I didn't have pizza I would starve to death" which made students laugh again. A few minutes later students were asked to generate individual lists and the teacher came over to assist Matthew with his writing. His responses of "sneakers" and "my dog" continued to amuse both the teacher and the students who were privy to his list.

In this setting Matthew's contributions were sought by the teacher and appreciated by her and his peers. Perhaps because the teacher legitimated his responses that were intended for the small group by calling on him and laughing aloud, Matthew gained status in his peers' eyes. His identity as a disabled student was less significant in the oral task of providing divergent responses than it was in the tasks where he had to read aloud his work or contribute questions about a book of which he had only heard part. Further, his identity as a male was less salient in this setting than in the small group situation where he was the only boy.

Summary

Certain settings seemed to facilitate Matthew's participation more than others. For example, his ideas were valued in the large group settings by the teachers and peers; he had the implicit support of the teacher (because Amy believed he was bright and capable) and her explicit support (Amy wrote his responses for him and laughed or commented on his ideas). However, small groups such as the *Jeopardy!* game appeared to limit his contributions. When he was the only boy in a small group that relied heavily on reconstructing information presented during book response time, Matthew experienced difficulties. The nature of the task, the amount of assistance and encouragement he received from the teacher, the group composition, and access to resources all seemed to influence his participation. His perspective as a working-class, Hispanic boy who had a history of not being able to read and write affected the ways in which his peers viewed him. Again, it is noteworthy that no single theory explains Matthew's actions; instead, analyzing how Matthew interacted in different contexts using multiple lenses allowed me to move away from viewing him as disabled or a victim of reverse sexism. In a similar way, Andy can be viewed as more than just a bright middle-class, white child by adding different lenses to understand his actions.

Andy

Andy, a European American child, lived with his mother who did accounting work in the zoology department at a nearby university. She held a BA in secondary education and biology. His father had completed his Ph.D. in economics recently and had to take a job in another state, but

the family expected to be reunited when his parents could find jobs in the same place. Although they lived in a small, moderately-furnished apartment near the school, they hoped to be able to buy a house in the near future. Andy was very successful in school. He had been with one of his current teachers in the multi-age setting for three years. She described him as:

> coming in at a second level (grade) with more vocabulary than I'll probably have in my entire life. . . . Today we were talking about idioms and figures of speech and he knew all about the literal meanings and the figurative meanings and of course it went over everyone else's head. He's like a little sponge, he soaks everything up.

Andy appeared to possess extensive cultural capital (Bordieu & Passeron, 1977) because of his educated parents and opportunities to learn school language at home. He was aware of his extensive vocabulary so that when he was asked where he acquired it, he responded, "I've been learning them (vocabulary words) since I was old enough to talk. My mom and dad used so many big words that I started to copy them." He also said that he learned from books he had read and "from my seven hours of TV watching." Additionally, he already had background knowledge about Egypt, especially hieroglyphics, that affected several situations.

Large Group Setting

Andy frequently volunteered to read his responses to the entire class. The teachers often laughed aloud at his responses, pointed out well-chosen words, or asked questions. Before reading the story the teachers frequently called on him to define particularly difficult vocabulary words. Andy seemed to enjoy providing definitions and examples. During these sessions his responses were highly valued by the teachers and were accepted by his peers. Andy often provided the right answers to questions posed about the books read aloud. For example, when the teacher asked students where the Egyptians kept their scrolls, one student responded "in the bust" but was ignored most likely because of the potential for laughter that this reference may have held. Andy provided the more specific response of "in the hollow statue of Nefertiti" which the teacher legitimated by repeating verbatim.

In large group settings Andy's identity was constructed as a capable student who seemed to know all the answers. His ideas and responses were valued and often extended. However, small group interactions posed a greater challenge.

Small Group Read-Alouds

Students were arranged in small groups to read aloud their responses to

the book *Into the Mummy's Tomb*, a nonfiction account of Carter's discovery of the tomb of King Tut. They were not to reach consensus on any interpretation but rather to share their open-ended responses. Andy was in a group with Juan, a working-class Hispanic boy; Cassie, a middle-class European American girl; Melissa, a European American girl; and Marta, a working-class Hispanic girl. Much of the initial interaction revolved around deciding who would read first. Melissa and Cassie chided Juan into listening and paying attention, then the following interaction occurred:

Juan: I am going last because I don't *know* nothing.
Melissa: Ms. [teacher], he don't want to be *quiet*.
Cassie: He keeps *talking*.

The students appealed to the teachers twice before they decided on who would begin reading. When the teacher asked them who would start, they decided on Cassie.

Cassie   [reads]: I just feel awful. I kind of feel like Carter and the rest of them are tomb robbers. Because I mean it is like they wouldn't [inaudible, some talk about the microphone interferes. Cassie resumes.] To be disturbed by them I would feel awful. I kind of think Carter and the rest of them are tomb robbers themselves. But at least they have lots of gold. They sure are rich, especially Carter. I guess I am surprised that Carter didn't get the mummy's curse.
Andy: Next.
Marta: [reads] "If I was in King Tut's position, I would not want to be disturbed in 3000 years and people are in my tomb chamber, that would be horrible."
Andy: *My* turn. I would open it. I am writing about one of the other things—whether or not you would—
Cassie: *Read* [drawing out the syllables]
Andy: All *right*.
Melissa: Sit up, *Cassie*.
Andy: [reads] "I would open it up because it is a great discovery. It would tell us a lot about life. It would also tell us a lot about the past."
Cassie: *Your* turn, Juan.
[inaudible for a few seconds]
Juan: I already *know*.
Melissa: *Hurry* up.
Juan: [reads] "If I were Carter (pause) I wouldn't be scared to open the tomb." *Finished*.
Melissa: [reads] "Dr. Carter was in a big mess. And it was a big challenge for him to say should he or should he not open the tomb."
Cassie: Now which was the *best* one?
Andy: I don't think she *wants* us to—
Andy was interrupted by the teacher ending the small group discussions.

When examining the relations expressed in the group from a neo-Marxist perspective, it appears that Andy (the only white male in the group) was

somewhat marginalized. Although he did participate in turn allocation by saying "Next" early on and assuming his own turn, he was discouraged from providing his explanation and was reminded to take his turn in round-robin fashion. The girls seemed to be asserting some power over the conversation by assigning turns, by telling students to hurry, and by resorting to outside authority when these tactics did not work. Juan, a Hispanic male, was initially perceived as a troublemaker who would not cooperate with the group. On the surface Juan seemed to go along with this assessment by saying, "I am going last because I don't know nothing." He complied to a point but resisted Cassie's dominance by responding that he was aware when it was his turn and by reading his work quickly, then announcing he was finished. Andy's cultural capital and understanding of the task did not necessarily aid him in the interaction with his peers; instead, accomplishing the task of everyone's reading aloud appeared to take precedence.

A social constructivist view adds the perspective of context and students' differing interpretations of the task as influences upon this interaction. The teacher had indicated in her directions for this task that all students in the group should have a chance to read aloud. However, in previous small group settings, students had to reach consensus about a response to a question. It seemed that some students, such as Cassie, interpreted the task as one in which they were supposed to vote, but Andy objected to this interpretation, understanding the task as reading their work to each other. He felt that before reading his text, he needed to explain that he had responded to a different prompt from the one the teacher assigned. But Andy's attempts at explanations were interrupted by Cassie's telling him to read. The classroom expectation that students were to read their work aloud and to listen to others but not necessarily discuss their responses may have contributed to students' non-acceptance of Andy's attempts to explain his response.

The teacher saw Andy as somewhat marginalized in the above interaction but reasoned that it was because he was creative and a nonconformist. When asked to focus on Andy's interactions, she said:

> Andy decided to write his own thing [laughs] not pertaining to the question. . . .He found something more interesting to write about. . . . Andy can get a tad wordy [laughs] and at this point they [the other students] are frustrated and they want to read and get it over with. They don't want to hear one of Andy's philosophical lectures.

The teacher viewed Andy from a personality perspective and saw him as a creative and verbose individual, but she also saw that he was affected by his social context—the other students in the group who were not necessarily interested in his explanations. Context and task play roles in the

next interaction as well. Although four of the group members are the same, the nature of the interactions is quite different and Andy assumes a more key, albeit silent stance.

Jeopardy! Game

Besides Andy, the group consisted of Juan, Cassie, and Marta (Melissa was absent that day). The group was having difficulty generating questions together, and so they divided into two pairs: Marta and Cassie who remained at the table, and Juan and Andy who walked away to look up information. Noticing their departure, Marta said, "See they walk away like they are afraid." Cassie responded, "We are not afraid of them, they are wimpy." Marta agreed, "They are wimpy, aren't they?" When they returned, I attempted to get the group on task and asked if the students were contributing ideas. Juan answered, "Oh, only me and Andy are, but they don't want to listen." Marta then responded to Andy, "We are asking questions and you say 'shut up.'" I suggested to the girls that they try again and Juan could write their questions. Cassie resisted, first by engaging in off-task banter and then by saying to me:

Cassie: *No*, we already *gave* them ideas, but *no*, they don't want to *listen*.
Juan: You don't *understand*. We had to put the *answers* first and then the *question*. She kept on telling us *questions* but she didn't know the *answers* for them.
Marta: I said '*Who* built the first pyramid?' [in a frustrated tone of voice]
Juan: *That* is not an *answer* [slowly]
Andy: That is under *pyramids* [in a matter fact tone of voice]
Cassie: A *question* [raising her voice]
Marta: You keep saying *everything* is an *answer*, *everything* is an *answer*, you don't even *know* [said quickly, raising her voice]
Juan: *Yes*, I do.
Cassie: That was *funny*.
Juan: That is why I am *working* because they don't *want* to.

The interaction escalated into an argument indicated by students' tones of voice and relative emphasis on words. Marta recognized that some member of the group needed to take the leadership, but they could not decide who, remarking about each other's intelligence and ability to be responsible:

Marta: They don't even *answer* them.
Juan: Because you don't even know the *answers* to them, *that's* why.
Marta: I asked you for this, but you all didn't listen, why should I ask you *now*?
Juan: But you are supposed to say the *answer* now—
Marta: I *was*.
Juan: Because I don't *know* it. It is *her* question—
Cassie: That makes *her* smarter than *you*—
Marta: *Somebody* has to be the *teacher* or something.
Juan: OK, it's *me*.

Marta: Not *you*.
Juan: Not *you*, you are not that *responsible*.

The students sat together and Juan attempted to give an idea which was challenged by Marta as being an answer, then Marta attempted to give an idea which was challenged by Juan:

Juan: Who was the pharaoh *alive* when *Moses* was alive?
Marta: It is an *answer* [quickly]
Cassie makes noise.
Marta: Who was the first *pharaoh*?
Juan: We already *have* that. We can't say that because it is a *god*.
Marta: It's a pharaoh and *queen*—
Juan: I know but—
Andy: The pharaoh *is* a god.
Juan: A pharaoh turns into a *god*.
Cassie: *Shush*, Andy.
Cassie then called the boys' names and left. Marta stayed and made another attempt at having an idea accepted:
Marta: What did the pharaohs *do* when they were in *Egypt*?
Andy: That is not in our *category*, that is "everyday *life*."
Juan: What did she *say*?
Andy: They asked what the pharaohs *did*.
Juan: Whose *tomb* was the last to be *found*? [pause] I think it was King *Tut*.
Andy writes "Who was King Tutankamun?"

Marta's idea was criticized for not being in the correct category (another group was generating questions for "everyday life"). Juan's response was accepted by Andy since he wrote it on the paper and then began to talk about point values. Cassie returned to the group and suggested splitting up into boys and girls. She then grabbed the sheet with the question and answers from Andy who got irritated because he had not finished. The session ended shortly after this division into boys and girls.

The relative emphasis on certain words such as "questions" and "answers" is an indication that some students had a clearer understanding of how *Jeopardy!* was played than others; some seemed to understand that the *Jeopardy!* game required them to give their responses in question form, while others did not. Students also appeared to have differing understanding of concepts such as pharaohs. There was also lack of clarity about the teachers' expectations with regard to whether they could generate questions that fit another group's categories. This lack of a shared understanding seemed to influence students' interactions and contribute to the escalation of the argument. Cassie and Marta seemed to become quite frustrated as expressed by their tones of voice, yet Andy remained calm. Andy, who by his own account watched seven hours of television daily, was no doubt familiar with the *Jeopardy!* format. He found that he could exert some leadership ability when other students in the group argued by remaining calm: "I guess I do have a little gung ho spirit and that's why most people go along with what I suggest. . . . I

think it's mainly because I've learned to harness my temper. I've been learning to harness my temper for ten years."

From a feminist perspective the group divided into two supposedly equal pairs, but the boys seemed to have the power. The boys decided on what the questions should be and recorded them; the girls attempted repeatedly to provide ideas, but those were not recorded. The girls attempted to resist the domination by alternately shouting insults, making noises, or refusing to cooperate. Although he said little, taking only 4 turns, Andy implicitly controlled the discourse by calmly explaining why the girls' answers were not acceptable, by recording the responses he found acceptable, and by assigning the point values. From a perspective focused on gender, the boys took over the tasks of generating the questions and recording the answers.

The teacher's interpretation, however, focused on the task—who took it seriously and who completed it—and not on the gender of the speakers. She said:

> I think Cassie did not take the assignment seriously, whatsoever. I think Marta fed off of Cassie. So Juan and Andy were trying to stay on task and do what they needed to do but they were not getting cooperation from Cassie and Marta and frankly Cassie can be extremely irritating. She does things to tick people off and she does silly things like that all the time, whereas the two boys were trying to keep on task.

She noticed that "the two boys were trying to keep on task" but did not believe it was because the girls felt excluded; she tended to think the group did not interact successfully because one student, Cassie, was not taking the task seriously:

> Cassie started getting mean and silly. She started saying you are crazy and started to offend them. [Gives examples from tape]. Maybe for a little while she tried to help but she was being so silly at other times that they were frustrated so they did not want to take her seriously.

When asked to reflect on Andy' role, she interpreted Andy as sitting back but quietly getting the task accomplished:

> This time it looks like Andy was sitting back. I think what Andy was probably doing was sitting back and doing it all himself and thinking of more questions. I think he was, I wasn't there to see it, but more on task than the rest. While the others were arguing he was probably thinking of questions and the way it should be worded. It seemed like something that was right up his alley because he was involved in the points and how many points should go to each question. I think Juan was on task until they all started arguing. Juan was doing the right thing but was not offering him any cooperation. Andy did not want to get involved really.

The teacher described the actions of the participants and seemed to make certain assumptions about students, especially Andy whom she presumed was "on task" whereas others were not. Although the teacher had recognized that students had divided into same-sex groups, she did not ascribe gender politics to their interactions. Instead, she seemed to analyze students as individuals and considered their "usual" behavior, (e.g., Andy understands the assignment, knows the answers, and completes tasks, whereas Cassie can be "silly"). Again, her interpretation shares much with trait or personality theory in which individuals are assumed to have fairly stable characteristics.

Summary

Andy possessed much cultural capital coming from an environment in which his parents supported middle-class literacy habits that were extended through extensive reading and watching television on his own. His cultural capital most likely aided him in large group settings in which vocabulary knowledge was important and in his small group's enactment of the *Jeopardy!* game which required knowledge of the game-show format. Yet in other small group settings his cultural capital did not always work in his favor since his peers alternately valued, accepted, or resisted his efforts contingent upon the group composition and the task. Whether he was creative or a nonconformist depended on the setting and the perspective of the person describing him. As with the other students, different theoretical positions highlight different aspects of Andy's interactions and complicate the view of him; no longer need he be considered just bright or an example of a category such as white, middle-class, and male.

Discussion: Constructing Multiple Subjectivities

Data from the classroom interactions indicate that each of the three students participated in different ways depending on a number of factors: the immediate context, the group composition, the task in which they engaged, and their positions with regard to gender, social class, and ethnicity. Each of the theoretical perspectives highlights different aspects of the students' interactions and adds a new dimension. While personality theory provides one lens to examine their participation and is a useful way for teachers to talk about the students, this theory does not account for why each of the three students responded quite differently in various settings. Focusing on the context and the task, the social constructivist perspective provides a means of understanding how the teachers' expectations, the students' background, and the group composition all influence student interaction, but it does not account for the power dynamics

that appeared to be operating in some of the situations. Likewise, the Neo-Marxist/feminist standpoint, while emphasizing the important influences of race, class, and gender, tends to essentialize students in terms of those categories.

The dynamic interactions of the students demonstrate the problematic of reducing interactions to any one theory. Poststructuralism, however, may provide a guide for interpreting students' seemingly inconsistent participation levels without completely dismissing other theoretical positions. Assuming that (a) perceptions of the world are governed by linguistic systems; (b) subjectivities, as products of social relations, may be inconsistent with one another (Belsey, 1980; Fiske, 1987); and (c) race, social class, and gender are partial, local, and contingent upon the situation (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991), poststructuralism provides possibilities for layered interpretations of students' interactions. For example, labels such as "shy," usually associated with trait or personality theory, might indeed describe a student's actions in a particular setting. Yet the task, the classroom context, and the group composition create meaning for those labels, while the student's life history of being a gendered, classed, racial human affects the ways in which he or she views and is viewed by others in a conversational exchange. Reviewing the data from a poststructuralist perspective can further educators' understanding of the dynamic positions students took within interactions.

The three cases suggest that students were continually in the process of constructing and reconstructing their subjectivities based on the demands of the particular social setting. Instead of seeing Rosa as shy or Matthew as disabled or Andy as a nonconformist, poststructuralism allows us to see these personality characteristics as fluid and constructed within the particular setting and discourse. Likewise, constructs such as ethnicity, culture, gender, and social class influence interaction but are not causal because they too are only partial and are dependent upon the particular setting (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). In some settings gender and ethnicity appeared to be more salient than in others. For example, Rosa's subjectivity as a Hispanic female seemed to play a larger part in the consensus task and the *Jeopardy!* game than it did in the open-ended response task. Matthew's subjectivity as a disabled reader and writer was more salient in the *Jeopardy!* game than in the large group setting of providing ideas for an afterlife. Andy's identity as a boy in the *Jeopardy!* game was more significant than when he read his responses aloud to a small group.

The dynamic interactions among students have some implications for reconceptualizing students and for classroom practices. First, it seems crucial that teachers and researchers move beyond a fixed view of stu-

dents as static and asocial individuals. Embracing theoretical positions other than trait theory can provide opportunities to see students as more than a personality type such as introverted or extroverted. Although labels such as shy or disabled or creative can describe ways that certain students interact in particular situations, attributing personality characteristics to students can be limiting, preventing teachers and researchers from seeing the dynamic relationships that are continually being reconfigured. Understanding and explaining the contexts under which certain actions and conversational exchanges occur holds promise of minimizing stereotyping and promoting deeper, more informed views of students.

Because students' race, social class, and gender influence what they bring to classroom settings and affect the ways in which they are perceived by others, it is important for teachers and researchers to recognize these constructs. As Ladson-Billings (1994) and Cochran-Smith (1995) have argued, educators need to see race, social class, and gender, rather than denying them. Yet, they need to see race, class, and gender not as fixed constructs because merely replacing a fixed view of the self with an essentialist view of race, class, and gender does little to advance education. Rather, educators' seeing race, class, and gender as dynamic features of students' identities that are continually being constructed in relationship with others seems to be a prerequisite to developing what Hoffman (1996) calls a "more reflexive multiculturalism" that includes "the development of knowledge about different cultural ways of seeing the self-other relationship, including more sociocentric, flexible and layered visions" (p. 565). As Belsey (1980) argues, the possibility for transformation lies in seeing the subject as a "site for contradiction" and "in the process of construction" (p. 65). If educators can enlarge their views to consider students as consisting of many subjectivities in which they are continually reconstructing and being reconstructed by others within the social context, they may come to serve students of diverse backgrounds in more productive ways.

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