Prescribing Proficiency: The Intersection of Teacher, Students and a Mandated Reading Program in One Elementary School Classroom in the Climate of High-Stakes Testing

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Prescribing Proficiency:
The Intersection of Teacher, Students and a Mandated Reading Program in One Elementary School Classroom in the Climate of High-Stakes Testing
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Prescribing Proficiency: The Intersection of Teacher, Students and a Mandated Reading Program in One Elementary School Classroom in the Climate of High-Stakes Testing

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract
Bien, Andrea (Ph.D., Education, Literacy Curriculum & Instruction)

Prescribing Proficiency: The Intersection of Teacher, Students and a Mandated Reading Program in One Elementary School Classroom in the Climate of High-Stakes Testing

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Elizabeth Dutro

This dissertation addresses questions about the impact and consequences of current school reforms by examining how mandated packaged reading programs contribute to a commodification of knowledge that is changing conceptualizations of literacy, teaching, and learning. Grounded in cultural-historical theories of literacy and learning, this work draws also on inter-disciplinary theories of race, language, and power in order to empirically examine how mandated reading curricula shape teaching and learning. This classroom-based, qualitative study is important as few studies have closely examined how market-driven reforms that purport to bolster teacher effectiveness and provide greater support to students of color and those from economically struggling families actually function for children and teachers in classrooms. My analysis provides evidence that mandated reading curricula, teachers, and students are inextricably linked in an all-encompassing web of reform. I argue that the defining feature of this web is a narrow notion of “proficiency” that is infused into all aspects of literacy teaching and learning from the macro levels of federal, state, and district policy to the micro level of classroom interactions. To support this argument, I marshal evidence to illustrate how ideas and assumptions surrounding “reading proficiency” matter in the everyday teaching and learning lives of teachers and students. This study contributes to critical literacy studies of classroom practice, policy analysis that speaks within and beyond the literacy studies field, and investigations into the complex relationship between teaching and learning pointing to the need
for teacher education that prepares novice teachers to successfully navigate the current climate of schooling in ways that connect with, rather than detract from, a focus on deep literacy learning.
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Introduction

An extensive body of research suggests that scripted literacy curricula are tools that are either taken up and followed in a manifest concession to high-stakes accountability policies or not followed in an act of resistance. This argument purports that teachers have little choice as draconian measures of accountability leave them with only either/or options to use or not use mandated materials with fidelity. During the six months I observed in her classroom, this study’s focal teacher, Norah, did not always “follow” the script of the mandated curriculum, Mondo Bookshop. In fact, about half the time she saw herself as resistant, selecting texts that were “cool,” “real literature by real authors.” But her day-to-day life as a fifth grade teacher at Lazarus Elementary School was, as the data will show, clearly mediated by the powerful discourses of a testing regime. Words like “data” and “proficiency” were never defined, yet discursively constructed meanings of these ideas were infused into, very literally, all aspects of teaching and learning. The ubiquity of those discourses left Norah positioned by the ideology that underscored the kind of reform a mandated curriculum represents, but not, necessarily, by the curriculum itself. In fact, what the findings from my qualitative, classroom-based study demonstrate is the power of the underlying ideology. The beliefs, values and assumptions that inform a district’s curricular choices were—in the case of the classroom, school and district featured in this dissertation—actually inculcated into all aspects of literacy teaching and learning processes from planning to instruction to assessment.

So often, the literature offers portrayals of teachers as soldiers. Soldiers of the testing movement, complying in lock-step fashion with top-down requirements to the script printed on the pages of a curriculum’s teacher’s manual. Or soldiers of the left, radical social justice activists with deep content knowledge, skillful pedagogy and a political savvy that places them
on the front lines of strikes, boycotts and sit-ins protesting the pervasive, persistent, systemic inequities that limit opportunities for their students and contribute to the gaps in achievement that we know exist along race and class lines. But, in 2011 the U.S. Census reported there were 7.2 million teachers in this country\(^1\). And common sense tells us that a teaching force of more than seven million educators is simply not easily divided into two categories of docile worker or outraged protester.

There are, undoubtedly, innumerable teachers who resist mandated curricula in their classrooms every day by small, perhaps even strategic means without striving to subvert the system altogether. We know these teachers. They have been my co-workers, my research collaborators and the students in my university classroom. I was that teacher. Norah, I believe, was one of these teachers. She opened her classroom to me, eager and willing to participate in a project designed with the expressed purpose of examining the curriculum required by her school district. She was openly critical of the book selections and proud to leave the scripted teaching guides in storage as she created and implemented her own plans for the teaching of reading. She did not fear her administrator nor did she worry about the security of her job in an era of accountability that ties teachers’ performance evaluations to students’ performances on state tests. Who are these teachers like Norah who sometimes bend, sometimes break, and sometimes follow the rules? Those of us who seek to better understand literacy classrooms, curricula, and opportunities for children to access rich, connected interactions with texts need to know these teachers, their stories and the factors that enable and constrain them in their efforts to be effective organizers of learning, teachers of children. We need to know them, to better understand the nuances of their practice in order to support them because throwing out the

\[^1\text{Retrieved from} \text{http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb10ff-14_school.pdf.}\]
curriculum—whether by legislation or an act of will by agentic teachers—does not address the extent to which ideologies about schools, classrooms, teachers, and kids underscore, are embedded within, and laminated over all of the practices that shape teaching and learning. The goal of the work presented here is to make instantiations of this ideology visible, to show how they functioned, and to explore the consequences for teachers and students. In particular, my goal is to show how those discourses functioned for the students who continue to be positioned as liabilities, victimized by standardized testing’s legacy of racism and classism, but who, paradoxically, also need to meet these tests with success as test scores are a key gatekeeper to attainment of educational, professional and financial opportunity.

**Why Scripted Reading Programs?**

The consequences of test-driven literacy instruction for both teachers and students are deeply important to me as a teacher and a researcher, as I, like Norah, was a teacher who navigated the constraints of a high-stakes testing agenda and a mandated reading program. I was a teacher of ten and eleven year old students whose countries of origin included, but were not limited to, Ghana, Nigeria, Laos, Poland, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, and the United States. Many of my students were living in poverty. Many were not. The children in my classroom, in any given year, lived with two parents, step parents, single parents, grandparents, and foster parents. Often, the children’s caretakers were bilingual or spoke a language other than English. In instances of the latter, the students often filled the role of translator. Every year, my class was rich with the diverse perspectives and experiences of some of the most wonderful young people I have had the opportunity to meet. And every year, I taught reading using *Open Court*’s (SRA/McGraw Hill, 2005) grade 5 reading series because it was the literacy curriculum mandated by my school.
My contentions with *Open Court* included a conspicuous lack of critical content and irrelevant storylines, which felt particularly mundane in my classroom that was rich with a diversity the curriculum left untapped. In spite of my contentions, *Open Court* provided the foundation for literacy teaching and learning in my school. To be clear, however, my disposition toward *Open Court* was formed before I was actually handed the brightly-colored spiral bound teacher’s manual I was required to follow in my role as a fifth grade teacher.

During my pre-service teacher training, I completed a ten-month student teaching assignment in a West Philadelphia K-8 public school, Penn Alexander, that was provided additional resources through a partnership with the University of Pennsylvania. Essentially, even though the school was accountable to state and district mandates, the teachers and administrators were offered latitude with the curriculum and instruction implemented throughout the school. So, while the City of Philadelphia supplied copies of the Harcourt *Trophies* literacy curriculum (*Open Court*’s curricular cousin that was followed in classrooms across the city), I never once saw it used at Penn Alexander. What I did see was a class of 17 kindergarten students learn to read, write, and develop a love of literacy learning over the course of the school year.

Penn Alexander was a new structure built in the heart of an old West Philly neighborhood; consequently, this beautiful, state-of-the-art school had a mouse population. My mentor teacher loved to share the anecdote of the day she found one of the mice dead in the *Trophies* box, always remarking with the perfect balance of earnest and comedic timing, “I would die, too, in a Harcourt box.” I learned to teach in an environment that valued meaningful teaching and learning and rejected commercial curricula and the hierarchical system that mandated its inclusion in schools.

My goal as a new teacher was to replicate the good practice I had learned as a graduate
student and pre-service teacher. Ideally, I would do so while serving a population of students not always afforded the resources and meaningful curricula so common among their white, affluent counterparts. My idealism was not shattered, but it was certainly challenged when I was introduced to the reading and writing curriculum I was expected to follow in my first classroom: *

*Open Court.*

**Situating This Study**

Commercial reading curricula such as *Open Court* and Harcourt *Trophies* are ubiquitous in our nation’s classrooms. Federal policy often mandates their inclusion in schools framing packaged reading programs as the elusive Silver Bullet (Allington, 2002, 2006; Berliner & Biddle, 1995). The related critique is that federal policy consequently prescribes a reductive style of teaching and learning characterized by phonics, rote practice and low expectation (Allington, 2002, 2006). This critique gives way to questions about how mandated reading programs might support a prescription for mediocrity.

My classroom experiences with *Open Court* and Harcourt-Brace raised tensions for me, personally and professionally, surrounding the quality of elementary literacy experiences offered by uniform reading materials. I found this tension to be particularly relevant as a teacher of non-dominant students (Rosebery et al, 2010; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006) who seemed to be the group most commonly subjected to these packaged programs (MacGillivray et al, 2004). I derived from these experiences my interest in understanding the policy climate that mobilizes the implementation of packaged reading programs; the impact on teachers, in particular examining notions of “de-skilling” (Apple, 1982; Shannon, 1987, 1989, 1990) and the colonizer/colonized binary (MacGillivray et al., 2004) that teachers negotiate when packaged curricula are imposed; and the impact on student literacy learning and development. What I found by looking at these
three dimensions of study—policy, teachers, and students—is that they shared inextricable links and mutually constituted each other in theory and practice. The mandated program, while important, was not as centrally important as I anticipated it would be. My study shifted from design through implementation and analysis as the testing climate emerged as the dimension more influential to teaching and learning than the reading curriculum. The state test (and the frantic push to churn out proficient test takers) was the defining feature of a tangled web of teachers, students, and curricula.

In the current landscape of literacy education, the prevailing notion of proficiency comes with, very literally, a hefty price tag. Proficiency can cost schools funding or, in extreme cases, schools can be closed down altogether; student proficiency can cost teachers their jobs and, for students, there is a costly risk associated with sorting and ranking children into static categories of reading ability based on the singular measure of a test score. Thus, more and more schools are adopting and requiring compliance with packaged reading programs in order to boost student performance on standardized tests. Inevitably, the imposition of these reading programs in order to attain the high value placed on test scores has implications for students and teachers.

Furthermore, Nichols & Berliner’s (2010) discussion of the costly risks and potential consequences attached to measuring proficiency with single indicators of performance on standardized state assessments invokes Campbell’s Law which stipulates that “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruptions and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor” (cited in Nichols & Berliner, 2010, p. 27). A multitude of examples of this phenomenon have made headlines in recent years. As recently as September 2012, thousands of Chicago Public School teachers went on strike disputing a list of issues related to the working
conditions in their district; a list which included the new teacher evaluation system that ties teachers’ jobs to students’ scores on standardized tests. Just a few months earlier during April 2012, Pearson, Inc., publisher of the New York State English Language Arts standardized tests for grades 3 through 8, received large-scale criticism for a litany of problems ranging from errors in the instruction booklets to a reading passage ambiguous enough for State Education Commissioner John King to release a statement that the question would not count towards students’ scores. Further, the issues and events surrounding the 2012 state tests prompted an open letter, signed by more than 1,400 school principals to the New York State Board of Regents expressing concerns over the impact of current reform measures, specifically regarding high-stakes testing and teacher evaluation. As New York contended with their state test dilemma, Philadelphia Public Schools announced their “Blueprint for Transforming Philadelphia’s Public Schools”, a plan developed under a $1.5 million contract with the Boston Consulting Group to close more than 60 schools over five years and restructure the district into “achievement networks”. A year earlier, the Atlanta Public School District was embroiled in the nation’s largest testing to date scandal with more than 175 teachers implicated for cheating and impropriety on state standardized tests. The cases included here point to of-the-moment consequences of reform, but they by no means comprise an exhaustive list.

In other words, recent examples from schools and districts across the nation illustrate the very high stakes attached to the word “proficiency”. The stakes are, indeed, so high that entire

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3 http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answersheet/post/talking-pineapple-question-on-standardized-test-baffles-students/2012/04/20/gQA8s01VT_blog.html


5 http://thenotebook.org/sites/default/files/BlueprintPublicPresentation_4_22_12.pdf
city school districts such as Philadelphia are radically re-organized if the criteria are not met. More than 6,000 Chicago Public School teachers are placed in danger of losing their jobs. Paradoxically, however, the measures may not be wholly reliable as the case in New York demonstrates. So, this raises important questions about what it means to teach and learn reading in a climate of public schooling where proficiency is paramount, even as proficiency may be both a narrow and an unreliable target.

To examine this territory, I asked the following research questions:

1. How does the Mondo reading program mediate literacy teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom?
2. What conceptualizations of teaching and learning are present in the language of the curriculum?
3. How do teacher and student negotiations of those discourses, in the context of larger accountability policies, shape students’ access to and participation in literacy learning?

Road Map for this Dissertation

Throughout the following chapters, I will refer to packaged literacy curricula, commercial literacy materials, scripted curricula, scripted reading programs, and other similar variations of these labels, interchangeably. Although the literature offers no official shared name for these programs, there is a common understanding that contemporary commercial literacy materials are rooted in the basal reading programs born out of the early 20th century Progressive Era of New Education (de Castell and Luke, 198; Shannon, 1989). A Review of Literature presented in chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth discussion of the genesis and evolution of basal readers, their role in the movement toward Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR)
and the central tensions related to their (often mandated) use in classrooms. This introduction is meant, primarily, to identify and contextualize the genre of commercial literacy materials I set out to examine in my study. In more than a century, their form and function has changed only slightly, typically commensurate with political and ideological shifts. The history of these curricula contributes to our understanding that basal readers and their contemporary iterations have endured, maintaining a strong presence in many of our nation’s public schools.

Their presence, however, tells only part of the story. As Luke (2010) explains, “the work of the enacted curriculum is done through repeated and habituated patterns of talk and exchange” (p. 15). Chapter 1 explicates the theoretical foundations that supported my analysis of just this: the work of the curriculum, the function of “curriculum-in-use” (Luke, deCastell & Luke, 1983). As my study is grounded, centrally, in cultural-historical theories of learning, my conceptual framing enabled me to examine the working relationship between teaching, learning and a commercial reading program. The cultural-historical perspective that I discuss in chapter 1 enabled me to focus my analysis on the material and ideational tools that mediated teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom, including the mandated program and the function of the language embedded in the documents that supported its use, as well as the system of activity of which Norah and her students were a part. As the motivations of my work are centered in equity, my framework also includes critical theories of race and discourse that were crucial for making connections between the mediated practices I observed in Norah’s classroom and the structures of power and privilege that shape the social institution of schooling.

Chapter 3 presents the methods of qualitative analysis I employed and which are grounded in and informed by my theoretical foundation. I provide a discussion of my methodology and trace the iterative processes of analysis in which I engaged as I moved through
the data collection and analysis phases of my study. There, I share the steps I took, the successes and challenges I experienced and the ways theoretically-motivated decision-making shaped my empirical analysis of reading instruction in Norah’s classroom.

I present my findings, first, by introducing Norah in chapter 4. Overarching all of the chapters is the argument that Norah was a teacher who was both resistant to and compliant with the district’s mandated program; however, these negotiations were subverted by the state test that played a powerful mediating role. In order to understand Norah’s negotiated practices and why she both did and did not follow the curriculum, I present, in chapter 4, the beliefs about literacy and learning underpinning her teaching practice. The two constructs—“data” and “proficiency”—that emerge in that chapter as centrally important to her role as a teacher at Lazarus Elementary also highlight a point of tension between her own beliefs about literacy learning and her perceptions of the district’s ideology.

Thus, in chapter 5, I focus on the ‘data-driven’ planning meetings Norah cited as valuable, supportive structures in order to portray the meeting as a space where Norah’s negotiations played out through text selections and compliance with a school-provided template. I theorize the teachers’ ‘data-driven’ planning as a type of procedural display (Bloome et al., 1989), an illusion that reified deficit perspectives and positioned teachers and students. Then in chapter 6, “proficiency” is taken up as a central focus. There, I draw on Luke & Freebody’s (1990, 1999) Four Resources Model to explicate what reading proficiency really meant in this context arguing the state tests constructed an impoverished view of literacy that was enacted in Norah’s classroom. Lastly, in the final analytical chapter, I infuse each of the features of the learning ecology—conceptualizations of data, proficiency, and Norah’s negotiated instructional practice—explored in the preceding chapters to discuss the “language structures”. The language
structures are fill-in-the blank sentence frames that scripted the students’ oral and written responses to texts. They are tools that instantiate the intersection of the ecology’s features and provide a clear example of how the tangled web of school reform manifests in classrooms and positions the students who are there to learn.

The conclusions and implications elaborated in chapter 8 recognize Norah’s resistance as both necessary and futile. She was a teacher who felt it was crucial to push back on the constraints imposed by the commercial reading program in order to create rich learning opportunities for her students. But, the focus on test performance ubiquitous across the school and district thwarted her efforts. I discuss the theoretical and methodological implications of classroom-based research designed to study teaching that is, inevitably, mediated by the socially and culturally constructed tools available in specific classroom, school and district contexts. Lastly, I point to the issues of equity entrenched in contexts of teaching that subvert rich learning opportunities to test prep and look to a future research agenda that will support my commitments to disrupting these inequities through empirical work.
CHAPTER 1
Theoretical Framework

The relationship between teaching and learning is well established in educational discourse, but is all too often a relationship not elaborated theoretically or in problems of practice. I argue that the inextricable relationship between teaching and learning begins with a conceptual framework that foregrounds learning and the ways in which the processes of teaching and learning are intertwined in practice. It is this more comprehensive and expansive framework—grounded in cultural-historical understandings of learning and previewed in this dissertation’s Introduction in reference to “curriculum-in-use”—that I wish to elaborate here. In doing so, I will illustrate the symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning, the important role of language, and the connection to teacher and student identity.

To extend this point, I draw also on Allan Luke’s sociological approach to literacy research that he argues engages a more complex analysis of the availability and flows of capital across settings guided by a “research agenda that focuses on the relationship between language and other forms of capital in social fields” (p. 129). Luke (2003) explains, “We are now dealing with the social and demographic impacts of postcolonialism and economic globalization, with culturally and linguistically diverse student bodies having become the norm in many educational jurisdictions” (p. 134). Thus, it is important to understand context in terms of how practices in local settings such as Norah’s classroom were situated within and profoundly influenced by a broader context that was constituted by literacy and language practices tied to a web of economic, historical, political, and cultural factors that mediate, or shape and intervene in, processes of teaching and learning.

Moreover, this framework is also useful for re-framing conversations informed by deficit understandings of students which has particular relevance when studying a classroom that
indexes the growing numbers of non-dominant students in U.S. schools. Issues of race and class are at the heart of the discussion about challenging deficit understandings of non-dominant students. Thus, I attempt to clearly conceptualize how I am drawing from cultural-historical perspectives on learning as well as theories of race that align closely with Luke’s notions of fluidity in language and literacy practices. In the sections that follow, I hope to provide insight into how I am leveraging theory to frame my examination of the relations between children, their teacher and a packaged curriculum.

**A Cultural/Historical Lens on Teaching and Learning**

In contrast with theories of learning and development that view individuals and social contexts as separate entities, cultural-historical activity theory (C/HAT), rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, sees individuals’ learning and development as *situated in and constituted by* the social and cultural contexts of their actions. Rogoff (2003) conceptualizes this view of human development as “a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations” (p. 47). Understanding learning and development within this framework “requires a focus on how individuals participate in particular activities, and how they draw on artifacts, tools, and social others to solve local problems” (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 450).

**Cultural Mediation and the ZPD: Central Principles of C/HAT**

The relationship between teaching, learning and development is represented in the zone of proximal (ZPD), a central construct within cultural-historical theory. Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Understanding the
ZPD as a zone rife with potential for learning and development, teachers can provide students with strategic forms of the guidance and collaboration Vygotsky discusses. Importantly, my understanding of the ZPD is not limited to this basic definition rather I include it here as a jumping off point in a discussion of cultural-historical theories of learning. Drawing from Gutierrez (2008), I conceptualize the ZPD as a collective space of transformative learning rather than the more narrow views that see the zone of proximal development as adult-centered limited, to “scaffolding”.

To that end, a fundamental concept related to the ZPD is, first and foremost, Vygotsky’s notion that “all human activity is mediated. He considered mediation by means of tools to be the defining characteristic of humans” (Diaz and Flores, 2001, p. 33). In other words, as Wertsch (2007) explains, “Instead of acting in a direct, unmediated way in the social and physical world, our contact with the world is indirect or mediated” (p. 178). The tools and artifacts that mediate our interactions with our social worlds are “not only material (e.g. hammer or a computer) but ideational (e.g. software programs, theorems in geometry, or literary constructions such as symbolism or unreliable narrators)” (Cole, 1996, p. 124). Within the zone of proximal development, material and ideational artifacts are the tools—the forms of assistance—that enable children to solve problems they are not, yet, able to solve, independently. This has clear implications for thinking about children’s learning and development; the material and ideational forms of assistance “mediating our interactions with the world make available the potential for new forms of higher psychological processes” (Cole and Griffin, 1983, p. 70).

For clarity, this is not to say that artifacts supporting children’s learning are either material or ideational and one form or the other should be chosen to create zones of proximal development. Tools and artifacts are both material and ideational. They “are materialized in the
form of objects, words, rituals and other cultural practices that mediate human life. They are ideal in that their form has evolved to achieve pre-scribed means to pre-scribed goals and these have survived to be our tools for our use in the present” (Cole and Levitin, 2000, p. 70). It is because “humans internalize forms of mediation provided by particular cultural, historical and institutional forces that their mental functioning is sociohistorically situated” (Wertsch, 2007 p. 178). Artifacts are embedded in the long histories of people and their cultural practices placing culture at the center of all human activity.

The affordance of the view that all activity is culturally mediated is that all children are seen as capable. Knowing what children can accomplish on their own represents completed development, but for the purpose of considering the organization of teaching and learning in classrooms I draw on Cole and Griffin (1984). Citing Vygotsky, they explain, “Instruction is good only when it proceeds ahead of development, when it awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in the process of maturing in the zone of proximal development” (p. 46). It is the job of instruction, in other words, to leverage the practices in children’s repertoires to foster learning in ways that optimize their potential. Children’s potential can be undermined by deficit views that people’s practices are barriers to learning rather than resources that support learning. Drawing on the theoretical constructs of cultural-historical views of mediated practice enables me to ask questions about 1) the ideology that mobilizes and is manifested on the pages of packaged reading programs and 2) how, if these curricular programs operate from a deficit perspective of both teachers and students, they are shaping processes of classroom teaching and learning.

The need for theoretical lenses that both illuminate and challenge deficit views reinforces the central importance of cultural mediation. Speaking to this point, Mike Cole explains,
“Culture is the accumulation of the resources of the past that have been made available in a social group in the present. Culture is history in the present” (M. Cole, personal communication, January 18, 2010). Implicit in the very idea that culture mediates the activities of social groups is an emphasis on people and their practices. Such an emphasis makes it possible to engage an analytic lens that sees culture as dynamic, embodied in moment-to-moment activity, situated in local context and changing over time through participation in the social world (Cole and Engestrom, 1993; Leontev, 1931; Luria, 1932; Vygotsky, 1978). These planes of analysis also have clear implications for examining the social organization of classrooms.

Capturing a fundamental idea about the organization of learning spaces, Cole and Engeström (1993) write, “Mediation of activity through artifacts implies a distribution of cognition among individual, mediator, and environment” (p. 13). A cultural-historical approach to teaching and learning, then, requires consideration of the individual child, mediating artifacts, and how the contexts within which individuals are participating in activities are organized to promote opportunities for learning that draw on all of the available resources in purposeful ways. This has particular significance in classrooms where packaged curricula are not merely a feature, but a central organizing tool that shapes, if not defines, interactions around literacy. Further, it is not only the students’ own toolkits (understood as the constellation of their interests, experiences, skills, expertise, and practices) that can be useful in learning environments, but the range of tools all children bring to heterogeneous learning spaces.

Drawing on these lenses in my study, I wondered the extent to which the Mondo reading program was at the center of classroom literacy activity and how a classroom organized around Mondo promoted or inhibited Norah’s and her students’ opportunities to leverage what they
brought, collectively, to the classroom in order to organize for learning that optimized the children’s potential for learning.

**Literacy as a Social Practice**

Cultural-historical perspectives on learning have been influential in shaping new conceptualizations of literacy learning, including how these processes are studied. This is apparent in sociocultural approaches to literacy, including social practice views of literacy and the New Literacy Studies. New Literacy Studies scholars Barton and Hamilton (2000) define literacy practices as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 7). Distinct from, but related to literacy practices are literacy events, first introduced in the seminal work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983) who defined literacy events as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (p. 93). Within both concepts are two important emphases that support my thinking about the implications of socially situated views of literacy for classroom teaching and learning. First, a conceptualization of literacy as patterns of cultural practices and participation within groups, rather than a set of discrete skills residing within individuals. Second, the notion that written language is a resource for interpretation and meaning making.

Generally, both concepts—literacy practices and literacy events—are important because they represent a paradigm shift away from literacy as a practice located within individuals and toward literacy as socially situated and participatory (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1982; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984, 1995). The overlapping idea here is that activity, as a unit of analysis, helps us to understand people’s participation in their learning environments and how the practices available in their repertoires can be tools for meaning making. The most basic interpretation of literacy as a social practice conceives of literacy as both a material and an
ideational artifact—ideational in that it is a cultural practice that mediates human experiences and material because “its form has evolved to achieve prescribed means to prescribed goals” (Cole and Levitin, 2000, p. 70).

Robust learning environments are those that are organized with an understanding that cognition is distributed across individuals, their learning environments and the literacy practices that mediate learning and development. The views of literacy articulated in this framework are central to my study and point back to the concept with which I began this chapter: the centrality of the mutual constitution of practices and social contexts as an organizing principle for my work. Literacy practices and literacy events are ideas that guide both my theoretical framing and some of the methodological approaches I will discuss in chapter 3.

**Implications for Literacy Teaching and Learning**

A cultural-historical approach to teaching and learning literacy rests upon theoretical ideas that privilege culture—specifically, literacy as a cultural practice—as a central mediating artifact. Traditional formal schooling is not typically informed by the same principles and rather tends to privilege a form of academic literacy narrowly conceived and more aligned with what Lea and Street (2010) label “study skills” and “academic socialization” approaches to literacy instruction. Lea and Street describe the conceptualizations of literacy embedded within these approaches as technical, a set of skills that can be transferred from setting to setting, and superficial, “treating writing as a transparent medium of representation that fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production of meaning” (p. 159). Acknowledging the contrast between these two approaches, my assumptions assign value to the cultural-historical approach and align with theories that critique “academic literacy” perspectives as problematic.
Within the cultural-historical tradition is an assumption that children are socialized to and through participation in cultural practices in their homes and communities before they arrive to formal school environments. Indeed, it is often at the moment children begin their formal schooling that a home/school dichotomy is invoked. This may be explained, in part, by Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) argument that “Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices” (p. 12). For instance, if vernacular language practices are valued in students’ out-of-school settings, but undermined in school settings this has a profound impact on what artifacts are made available to mediate student learning. Through the problematic lens of a deficit perspective, vernacular language and literacy practices are often marked and seen as illegitimate because they are not normative.

In contrast to this deficit view, cultural-historical theories of learning and literacy engage a lens that blurs the line between home and school. Language is seen as a valuable resource for fostering a classroom ecology that leverages the skills and knowledge students carry with them in ways that afford opportunities for learning. When the home/school binary is collapsed and students’ linguistic and cultural repertoires of practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) are recognized, they can be leveraged as tools to mediate learning. As literacy scholar Mary Kalantzis (2011) emphasizes we must shift our focus away from dichotomous thinking about what students “know” or “don’t know” and instead see learning and knowing in terms of repertoires with which all students must be provided opportunities to use for processes of meaning making.

To the point of organizing for the forms of learning and knowing within this point of view, classrooms informed by and built around principles of cultural-historical activity theory (C/HAT) are oriented toward an object of learning. Importantly, the object of learning should not
be conflated with *objectives*. Objectives typically provide the architecture for the daily activities of traditional classrooms. From the C/HAT perspective, these objectives—the content, material, and skills with which children engage in their day-to-day activities—mediate children’s learning. In other words, skills are not seen as the point of learning, but rather as tools for learning. The object of learning, to leverage the language associated with C/HAT theoretical tools, in an elementary classroom might reference what it means to be a reader or writer. The skills associated with this goal become the tools for, rather than the end point of, learning what it means to become a reader or writer.

To illustrate this idea concretely, I draw on Kris Gutierrez’s (2008) work around developing sociocritical literacies with young people participating in the University of California, Los Angeles Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI). She explains the object of learning for the MSLI students as a “sociohistorical reconstruction of what it means to be a migrant student” (p. 149). While the students engaged in writing autobiographical stories (to provide just one example of the nature of MSLI activities), the skills and practices embedded in the production of these texts were leveraged as tools to achieve the more expansive object of learning that had potential to lead to transformative ends.

While the MSLI is, indeed, a compelling example of what can be achieved when learning is oriented toward richly conceived objects of learning, this notion has particular relevance in formal classroom environments. Privileging objects of learning shifts the emphasis away from teaching and onto learning which stands in contrast to not only the traditional model of instruction, but especially a classroom model organized around a packaged reading program that

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6 Gutierrez (2008) defines sociocritical literacy in contrast to school based-literacies writing, “Academic literacy is often narrowly conceived, while a sociocritical literacy emerges in discursive and embodied practices including writing, reading, and performative activities with transformative ends” (p. 149).
prescribes the teacher’s practice. For instance, in scripted curricula classrooms, the programs may often not be used as tools to mediate situated interactions around reading and writing. Instead, following the predetermined script becomes the goal of classroom interactions which diminishes the possibility of robust instruction. I share an additional example in the following section to provide further insight into how cultural-historical theoretical ideas can connect to practice in the context of formal learning.

C/HAT at Work in the Classroom

Carol Lee’s Cultural Modeling Project—based on the idea “that African American English Vernacular offers a fertile bridge for scaffolding literary response, rather than a deficit to be overcome” (Lee, 2001, p. 101)—demonstrates what is possible when classrooms are re-organized to provide students with a range of tools upon which to draw to engage and become socialized to the kinds of practices that hold access to power. Lee’s (2001) analysis provides a powerful example of how deficit perspectives can function in ways that are harmful for students, as well as how a C/HAT approach can provide the tools to re-conceptualize the ways classrooms can be organized for all students, particularly those students burdened by the stamp of underachievement. She captures teaching and learning in her own urban high school English classroom, highlighting the unexpected format of teaching intellectually demanding texts to a group of students whose standardized test scores are ranked in the lowest possible quartiles.

Lee’s examples of classroom talk and activities reveal the affordances of a strategically re-organized learning environment designed to leverage students’ tool kits in order to promote deep learning of official academic content. For instance, during an extended unit of instruction focusing on symbolism, the students read Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize winning novel, Beloved, Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man, as well as short stories, book chapters and poems. Unique to
her curricular design was the inclusion of the lyrics to several R & B, rap, and hip-hop songs and an HBO series all popular with the students and relevant to their home and out-of-school lives. Leveraging these “texts”\(^7\) from students’ everyday lives, Lee was able to support their opportunities to learn strategies for detecting and interpreting symbolism which would, in turn, be made public and applied to canonical texts. Lee (2007) described her intentions to “establish a culture of inquiry, of argumentation with evidence, of hypothesizing, of intellectual risk taking as norms for participation in class,” (p. 61) in discussion of the ways she and her students worked through processes of meaning making and problem solving. These processes are revealed, pointing to just one example, in the students’ interactions around a song, *The Mask*, written and performed by The Fugees. While several details of the students’ analyses of *The Mask* have important implications for learning (e.g. because the students have more prior of knowledge of the music and lyrics than the teacher they are the experts in this interaction which shifts classroom talk away from standard teacher-led I-R-E patterns and toward a ratio of teacher-student talk that privileges the students), their use of African-American English Vernacular (AAEV) to grapple with symbolism instantiates what is possible when home and school—a binary discussed earlier—are not only bridged, but bridged meaningfully. Inviting AAEV, a community-based language practice, into the classroom and framing it as legitimate for communication constructs a safe, playful space where many students are more likely to take intellectual risks.

Speaking to the disruption of the home/school dichotomy, Lee (2001) argues “that what students bring from their home and community lives are as important as the hybrid space that is constructed in the class” (p. 115). She recognizes vast potential within the hybrid space that

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\(^7\) Engaging the concept of text articulated by William Pinar (1993) who borrows the terms from Derrida and other Poststructuralist scholars, “text implies both a specific piece of writing and, much more broadly, social reality itself” (p. 60).
emerges when students—as all students do—bring their unofficial practices into official spaces. Lee is able to purposefully leverage AAEV to mediate learning not because her students are predominantly African American, but because this was a linguistic practice she observed with this particular group of African American students. Her knowledge of her students’ repertoires of practices allowed her to focus on her students’ cultural resources, drawing on the “explicit forms of knowledge the students use tacitly in their routine everyday practices” (p. 119) in order to analyze the intellectually demanding texts of the symbolism unit.

Lee’s approach is demonstrative of an orientation toward learning that is markedly different than what might commonly occur when teachers proceed toward the type of learning objective often articulated in English language arts standards and curriculum materials: Read and respond to a novel. Focusing on participation in an intellectual community as the object of learning enables Lee to organize for learning in ways that leverage the expertise distributed across her students, including their everyday linguistic practices, in order to engage analysis of relevant texts. She also transforms her own position in the classroom, recognizing her role as a mediator of learning rather than the one in control of the activity. The conclusion Lee reaches is that the majority of her students participated in the literary activities, demonstrating responses to the text that are characteristic of expert readers, a competence that goes unrecognized when the organization of the classroom conceals ability and constrains opportunities for participation. Hers is but one example of important work that draws on a C/HAT framework to promote not only learning, but equitable opportunities for robust learning. With this claim, an important question emerges: what are equitable opportunities for learning?

**Conceptualizing Race in a Conversation About Equity & Learning**

Educational research oriented toward equity and away from deficit assumptions must, I
argue, include analyses of the intersections of race, learning and identity that occur in classrooms. There is a long history of well-established scholarly work dedicated to issues of race and learning that reflects a range of perspectives that have come in and out of favor in the U.S. over more than a century. For the theoretical framing of my study, I will specifically discuss some conceptualizations of race and identity rooted in cultural-historical theory. This strand of my theoretical framework provides useful tools for examining the relationship of race, identity and learning as dynamic and socially constituted rather than static and located in individuals. It is this point of view I believe supports a move toward equitable teaching and learning practices and supports the re-framing of persistent deficit perspectives.

**Defining Race**

In seeking to examine how race, learning, and identity intersect in classrooms that use commodified reading programs, I engage scholarship on conceptualizations of race from a range of disciplines. Sociologists and race scholars Omi & Winant (2004) offer a useful definition that speaks to the function of racial categories, writing, “Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55). Implicit in their definition is the understanding that while race is a socially constructed ideological concept, the material effects on the lives of groups and individuals are very real. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Acknowledging the complexity, multidimensionality and historical variability of race, I engage theoretical lenses that illuminate the intersections of race with the variables of class, gender, sexuality and nationality (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). Moreover, a conceptualization of race cannot exclude whiteness, particularly as I draw on theoretical tools that see race and racial categories as part and parcel of a hierarchical categorical system of white supremacy. (Frederickson, 1981; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant,
Through the lens of postcolonialism, the social construction of race is instrumental for the maintenance of power relationships. Racialized representations are value-laden, positioning the “Other” in opposition to a dominant group. These representations of dichotomized societies are relational, elevating the status of “us” and subordinating “them” as well as durable, constantly perpetuated through text and language (Said, 1979). In the case of the United States system of education, “us” can be characterized by white, middle class values that are positioned as dominant to “them”, groups identified as non-white and/or lower socioeconomic status. One of the most pervasive examples of this is the achievement gap rhetoric invoked to rationalize stratified levels of student test performance.

Postcolonialists Rizvi, Lingard and Lavia (2006) illuminate the complexities of an us/them power relationship citing the work of Frantz Fanon,

Fanon regards as deeply problematic any characterization of colonialism in terms of a binary opposition of colonizer and colonized. Instead, he insists that colonialism may only be understood as a complicated network of complicities and internal power imbalances between groups within the broader categories of colonizer and colonized. (p. 251).

A set of assumptions about knowledge undergirds postcolonial theory, which helps connect Fanon’s conception of colonization with relationships of power and acts of complicity commonly found in classrooms where the teachers are bound to mandated reading materials and subject to surveillance and controls. Said (2005) articulates these fundamental assumptions stating, first, that knowledge exchange is not unidirectional, but rather knowledge is constructed. Second, majority voices do not simply impose their ideologies onto non-dominant populations. Instead,
there is a simultaneous, co-articulation of both dominant and non-dominant voices; for instance, while one voice may be privileged over the other in the context of traditional schools, both perspectives are always present. This more dynamic understanding of what often gets constructed as an us/them dichotomy reveals an opportunity to acknowledge and ratchet up the non-dominant voice rather than assuming a static transference of knowledge where the minority voice is silenced or absent.

While majority and minority voices are always present, power relationships, inevitably, assign value to the voice that represents the dominant group. Thus, there are attempts to disregard the ever present and co-existing perspective of non-dominant groups and, as Luke argues, “A requirement of a critical, political sociology is to begin systematically explicating how texts operate in particular political interests to sustain relations of domination and power” (Luke, 1995-6, p. 18). Such homogeneous, monolingual texts must be critiqued as covert delivery systems of the dominant ideology, but, as postcolonialism reveals, the multi-discursive nature of classrooms precludes the possibility of such a simplistic process of delivery. Said (2005), states that “a complex and dynamically relational treatment of culture and identity should deeply inform curriculum in schooling” (p. 162).

Race and Learning

Connecting this overarching discussion of race to classrooms, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) and Lee (2002) offer similar frameworks for a conceptualization of race in research on learning that argues for a focus on cultural practices—practices that have been shaped over a long history by ethnicity, race and language. Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) challenge the “widespread assumption that characteristics of cultural groups are located within individuals as “carriers” of culture—an assumption that creates problems, especially as research on cultural
styles of ethnic (or racial) groups is applied in schools” (p. 19). In other words, their framework is meant to provide a lens for looking at practices, rather than generalizing about the static conceptions of what it means to be a member of a category of race, gender or socioeconomic class.

Relying solely on static racial categories implies there is an inherent relationship between individual traits and group membership. This problematic approach “makes it more likely that groups will be treated as homogeneous” (Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003, p. 20). Lee emphasizes—in a statement that fits neatly with Omi & Winant’s theory of race—that she “sees no function to the system of racial classification used by the U.S. government or research community beyond the need for those who classify themselves as white to maintain a hegemonic position” (p. 284). The categories become tools for positioning individuals based on their membership within those categories.

Proceeding from a framework that turns an analytic lens on practices enables researchers to see both regularity and variance within groups. The goal is not to “lose the consistencies in patterns of practice and belief systems that do have regularity within communities” (Lee, 2002, p. 285), but rather to transcend assumptions that membership in racial categories is simply inherited or signifies a set of static traits. Thus, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) propose a shift away from assumptions that “regularities in groups are carried by traits of a collection individuals to a focus on people’s history of engagement in practices of cultural communities” (p. 21).

An expanded framework that privileges practices as a point of analysis illuminates the need not only to privilege what people do, but to recognize the complexities and intricacies of the human experience. The earlier example of Lee’s (2001, 2007) work in an urban high school provides a for instance of the ways she engages this proposed framework to examine race and
learning for her own students. She “privileges sources of knowledge that the students recognize are devalued by schools,” (Lee, 2007, p. 26) to create participation structures that support their identity development as members of a classroom community of intellectual inquiry (Nasir, 2008).

**Identities, Language & Power**

**Teachers’ and Students’ Identities**

Identity is a central construct in my study. In viewing identity as complex and discursive, I am interested in how Norah and the students define themselves in relation to the selves made available through both the Mondo reading program and the learning context that shapes and is shaped by the use of the Mondo program (Davies & Harre, 1990; Foucault, 1977). Underlying the assumption that identity is fluid and reconstituted through language and across settings, is a view articulated by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996) who explains, “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions” (p. 4). The theoretical tools afforded by this perspective enable me to examine how the Mondo program operated in ways that impacted the students’ and teacher’s views of themselves and each other in relation to larger discourses of race, language, literacy, and what it means to be a successful reader and writer.

Further, identity, which shares an inextricable link with learning (Boaler and Greeno, 2000; Lave and Wenger 1991), is conceptualized in the literature as formed in practice across space and time. Peneul and Werscht (1998) define identity “as a dynamic dimension or moment in action, that may in fundamental ways change from activity to activity, depending on the way, in each activity, the purpose, form, cultural tools and contexts are coordinated” (p. 84) In line
with this idea, Holland et al. (1998) define identity as a social product that is “historically contingent, socially enacted and culturally constructed” (p. 7). Identity is, in other words, never static, always changing, negotiated.

To that end, Gee (2000a) provides a conceptualization of identity that aligns with the definitions provided here, writing that identity is “the ‘kind of person’ one is recognized as ‘being’, at a given time and place which can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable” (p. 99). In other words, the argument Gee makes—one that is consistent across the literature on which I draw—is that every human being has multiple identities. McCarthey (2001), in her study of the identity development of elementary school students, cites Mishler (1999) and Sarup (1996) whose conceptualizations of identity also speak to the multiplicity explicit in Hall’s definition of identities as fragmented and fractured. For example, a student may identify in numerous ways (e.g. African-American, boy, student, brother, son, friend, good reader, basketball player). He may enact these identities separately in different places at different times, foregrounding some identities in some contexts while concealing others. The practices people enact at particular moments are meant to signal that they are, at Gee puts it, a particular “kind of person”.

Equally as important is how these identities are taken up in social context. Interpretation of identities, “tied to the workings of historical, institutional and sociocultural forces” (Gee, 2001, p. 100), shapes access and participation. Access to a community requires participants to adopt the practices associated with what it means to be a member of that community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000). At any moment, any combination of identities can be at work; how they are recognized and interpreted becomes salient in interaction, which, in the context of classrooms, has real implications for learning.
In close connection to the ways these identities are enacted and recognized are the ways these identities are labeled, assigned to categories that are neatly packaged through longstanding storylines about students and families. For instance, “struggling reader”, student who “refuses to learn”, or families that “don’t care about education” are labels that invoke particular connotations and shape the interpretations of just who students are in classroom interactions. This has particular relevance in the context of a classroom where the categories and labels are pre-printed and bound into the anthologies and corresponding teacher’s manual of a packaged reading program. To this point, Lea and Street (1998) explain, “A student's personal identity—who am 'I'—may be challenged by the forms of writing required in different disciplines, notably prescriptions about the use of impersonal and passive forms as opposed to first person and active forms, and students may feel threatened and resistant—‘this isn't me’” (p. 3). The identities that are or not available in the context of learning contributes to an evolving definition of what it means to be legitimate in that context at the moment.

Drawing heavily on performance theory (e.g. Butler, 1990) in relation to racial identities, E. Patrick Johnson (2003) posits that “Performance may not fully account for the ontology of race” (p. 9) highlighting the distinction between “doing” and “living” race. In other words, borrowing an example Johnson shares from Angela Davis—she is a Black woman when she wears jeans just as much as when she wears Kente cloth. Wearing Kente in her performance as a black woman does not encapsulate the experience of Black women. Her lived experience as a Black woman far transcends the parameters placed on what some may assume it means to perform as a categorically Black woman. While Johnson acknowledges that performance is based on patterns of practices and consumption related to categories of food, language and music, he problematizes the reliance on these categories as representative of race because the
categories are, in effect, too unstable. Thus, identity in this view is not inherent in individual bodies, but is enacted through everyday practices.

This view of identity resonates with Patricia Hill Collins’ (2004) argument that, “Racism and heterosexism share a common framework that uses binary thinking to produce hegemonic ideologies. Such thinking relies on oppositional categories: Black/White, Men/Women, Heterosexual/ Homosexual…Within this oppositional logic, the core binary of normal/deviant becomes ground zero for justifying racism and heterosexism” (pp. 96 – 97). In other words, oppositional logic undermines a view of identity as multiple and performed and, instead, attempts to define people through static categories based on the assumptions attached to and underlying the labels assigned to these categories. For example, Johnson (2003) theorizes that Black “authenticity” is often associated with working class/poor Black “folk”, to borrow his term. In this view, black middle class is deemed inauthentic when compared against working class because the middle class, essentially, is corroborating the dominant narrative of the hegemony. My growing frustration with static categories continues, inspiring me to turn to classrooms as possible sites where the boundaries of fixed categories can be collapsed.

Viewing identities as multiple and performed influences both my approach to understanding children’s classroom experiences and the texts they encounter. There is a need to observe and interact with the teacher and students over time, across the planning and teaching of literacy curricular units and stories and attend to the ways their interactions with each other and the texts unfold across the school year. This varied and long-term view of teacher’s and children’s use and interpretations of texts afford opportunities to complicate notions of “authentic” or “inauthentic” instead situating textual meanings within the social context of the classroom space. For instance, in their study of children’s literature teaching and learning,
Brooks and McNair (2009) explain that children “situate themselves in relationship to their classroom teacher as well as a larger community of their peers who may represent varied racial and economic backgrounds. As a result, from a reader’s point of view, ascribing cultural authenticity to a text may be something that fluctuates over time and across varied settings” (p. 152).

In this view, it becomes increasingly evident that fluidity is more authentic than static sets of ideas of what it means to capture “authentic” representations of identities and experiences in a book, an illustration, or a classroom conversation. However, rarely is such a complex notion of racialized experience part of the conversation around race and achievement in curricular materials, classrooms, and schools. It is possible that language is the barrier that rests between simplicity and complexity. The categories available do not invoke complexity. In the next section, I turn to lenses on the relations between language, or discourse, and identities that point to the role of discourse in both the construction and interruption of reified categories through which children in literacy classrooms are often sorted and ranked.

**Identities Through the Lens of Language and Power**

In order to understand the relationship between discourse, learning, and identity in the context of a packaged curriculum reading classroom, I draw on theoretical tools that illuminate the power relations tied up in discourse practices (Fairclough, 1989). To be clear in my use of power as a theoretical concept, I turn to literacy scholars Moje and Lewis (2007) who discuss power as “produced and acted through discourses, relationships, activities, spaces, and times by people as they compete for access to and control of resources, tools, identities” (p. 17), a view that points, again, to my earlier conceptualization of identity, theorized by Stuart Hall as constructed across multiple settings, practices and discourses. In other words, children’s and
teachers’ identities—and, as I have argued in this framework, their inextricable link to teaching and learning—in a classroom centrally organized around scripted curricula must be examined in relation to the ways the curricular materials create or deny access to different discourse practices (Foucault, 1977).

Fairclough (1989) explains “there is power behind discourse” (p. 55), a notion that matters profoundly in the study of a literacy classroom where children and teachers draw on words and language to interpret and garner meaning from texts. As discourse practices are imbued with power, there are clear messages about what “counts” as legitimate for the purposes of school-based reading and writing. In a classroom where a packaged reading program is present, the intersections of language and power are particularly salient as the materials directly index institutionalized discourses of power and teachers’ and students’ repertoires of practice are at the risk of being de-valued by the one-size-fits-all prescribed instruction.

Equally as important to how power is represented in and by the top-down imposition of packaged literacy programs is just how they shape interactions in classrooms. While I have argued that commodified programs masquerade as value-neutral delivery systems of what is a decidedly value-laden, dominant set of literacy skills, I also make the point that the multi-discursive, heteroglossic nature of classrooms precludes the possibility of such a simplistic process of delivery. Representation, Hall (1997) writes, is “production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the real world or imaginary worlds” (p. 17). While the representations in the packaged program reference an imagined world where categorical labels encapsulate human experience and literacy is constituted by value-neutral skills, in use—in classroom interactions—nuanced meanings are constructed and the referential world is more
complex.

In this chapter I have explicated the theory that informed my study of Norah’s classroom, describing how concepts grounded in cultural-historical theories of learning, theories of race and language work in concert. This composite framework illuminates how teaching, learning and identity are woven together and the ways race and language can shape these processes to either reinforce or disrupt deficit perspectives. In chapter 3, I provide a detailed discussion of the analytic tools and methods I use to study what occurred when Norah and her students interacted around a commodified reading program. Next, in chapter 2, I look closely at the scholarly literature that has addressed the ways literacy learning is mediated, the emergence of packaged reading programs, the ideologies that give them power and momentum and the impacts of such policy-mandated curricular materials on children and teachers.
CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

Speaking to the purpose of education, Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) writes, “No society in a knowledge-based world can long prosper without supporting a thinking education for all of its people. A societal infrastructure disintegrates, both economically and socially, when large numbers of individuals cannot become productive citizens” (p. 15). There are competing goals for public schooling that underscore debates in education. One school of thought, characterized by social efficiency, ascribes to the belief that schools train workers. An alternate view suggests that the goal of public education should be to prepare critical thinkers and thoughtful citizens. Darling-Hammond’s statement speaks to the societal value of the latter point of view. To that end, from the civil rights perspective, W.E.B. DuBois (1949/1970) wrote:

Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. . . . The freedom to learn . . . has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be (pp. 230–231).

In order to exercise full membership in society and fulfill their responsibilities as the productive citizens upon whom American and global economies and societies will depend, children require the skills to critically examine important ideas and questions. They need opportunities to engage in creative problem solving and the re-imagination of their futures

Donald Macedo (1993) is critical of an approach to literacy that “emphasizes the mechanical learning of reading skills while sacrificing the critical analysis of the social and political order that generates the need for reading in the first place” (p. 189). This type of
mechanical approach that has the potential to undermine opportunities for critical thinking and analysis is the hallmark of many packaged reading programs and the basic skills movement that is the driving force behind them. Consequently, harkening back to DuBois’ insights, they become a civil rights issue.

The Review of Literature that follows will define scripted curricula and discuss relevant points of critique offered by scholars of literacy and learning. To better understand how mandated compliance with commercial literacy programs undermine students’ rightful access to robust learning experiences, I will address the relationship between scripted programs and representations of race, class and gender, specifically. Lastly, I will discuss the complex role teachers play in a system that mandates certain curricular materials that contribute to maintenance of the hegemony (Macedo, 1993). Capitalizing on the existing body of literature on hybridity, I will explore the ways teachers are found to be simultaneously complicit and resistant, a duality that is inevitable when attempts are made to script and prescribe teaching practice and complicity is tied to high-stakes accountability. The inherently hybrid nature of classrooms suggests that teachers’ and students’ experiences with basal programs reside within a complex space, an understanding of which will provide insight into the truly enabling and constraining factors of teaching and learning within the current landscape of public education.

**Scripted Curricula**

First and foremost, because my intention is to focus an analytic lens on the ways mandated reading programs mediate classroom interactions, I want to briefly review how the concept of mediation is taken up by literacy scholars grounded in the cultural-historical tradition. Moreover, as the packaged programs are of central importance to my study, discussion of how such programs—of which Mondo is but one example—are conceptualized in the research on
teaching and learning is fundamental. This includes discussion of where their point of origin is embedded within the history of U.S. education. Additionally, I will address how these programs have not simply endured for more than a century, but have become, in recent years, all the more visible as the 21st century trend for intervention strategies has come to rely almost exclusively on the National Reading Panel’s criteria for scientifically-based reading research (SBRR).

Ultimately, my goal is to acknowledge the social and historical context surrounding the advent of packaged curricula and situate the larger discussion in our current moment of education reform—a moment that, since it was passed in 2001, has been profoundly influenced by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and, most recently, the introduction and adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Many scholars have responded to the rhetoric that frames packaged curricula—and the scripted instruction that typically accompany them—as the elusive Silver Bullet that is going to “fix” inequities in our nation’s schools (Allington, 2002, 2006; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Luke, 1988; Shannon, 1983, 1989). In spite of decades of critique, however, the often-mandated inclusion of packaged literacy programs persists, while their staying power is simultaneously matched by the same entrenched inequities the Silver Bullet was meant to eradicate. A brief overview of this historical trajectory will connect Norah’s fifth grade classroom with the long tradition of curricular decision-making that precedes (but has a salient impact on) her day-to-day interactions with students around reading.

Broader discussion of the policy climate and the ideologies that shape it are as important to understand as the impact each one has, in practice, on the interactions in Norah’s classroom. Thus, following a discussion of the socio-historical context of packaged literacy programs this

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8 A summary of findings from the Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read is available at http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm.
Review of Literature continues by addressing how these ideological and political decisions impact children and teachers, theoretically or in practice. As Luke (1987) explains, “Although [commercial literacy materials] are produced by large companies and marketed to administrators and consultants representing local, regional, and state jurisdictions, [basal readers’] ultimate consumers, of course, are those teachers who teach them and those students who read and respond to them” (p. 96) giving credence to the importance of this layered approach.

Scripted Curricula as Mediating Artifact

While scripted literacy programs are implemented in classrooms for reasons that are, typically, expressly academic, it is important to consider how basal readers mediate other aspects of student learning in addition to technical reading and writing. Luke (1987) speaks to the social function of textbooks, arguing they “act as an interface between the ‘officially’ state-adopted and state-sanctioned knowledge of the culture, and the learner. Like all text, school textbooks remain potential agents of mass enlightenment and/or social control” (p. 96). His point reminds us that literacy instruction, especially literacy instruction that is prescribed and mass-produced for a universal teacher and class of students, is never a neutral act. How programs such as Mondo shape the teaching and learning of literacy skills is equally as important as how they position students and teachers in a larger social context.

Closely connected to the notion that basal readers can be leveraged as tools for teaching, learning and socialization is the range of ways they are (or are not) used as tools. For a variety of reasons including the overly prescriptive nature of the curricula, acute pressure from school and district administration to comply, or shallow understandings of literacy and learning (Valencia et al., 2006) teachers may use scripted programs as the object rather than a tool to achieve a more robust object of learning. Engeström (1991), in particular, critiques learning environments that
define the text—or, in the case of scripted curricula, the entire packaged program—as the goal of teaching and learning instead of leveraging it as just one form of assistance for learning.

Defining texts as objects of rather than tools for learning is an attempt to strip away the meaning and context of which literacy teaching and learning are a part. The conflation of object and tool invokes Street’s (1994) critique of what he terms the autonomous literacy model. Embedded in this model is an assumption that literacy is a neutral, technical set of universal conventions which, Street argues, is unsound since “conventions derive their meaning from specific social contexts” (p. 28). Street posits that while literacy conventions are not universal since literacy is situated within the unique social, political and economic conditions of a group and that group’s history, there is a dominant set of conventions. The right answer, truth in the text and prescribed procedures are not part of a universal set of ideas, rather they align with the practices and conventions of the dominant class, often perceived as universal because they are normative. Such dominant, normative conventions are similar to what Bakhtin (1981) calls “authoritative discourse” defined as privileged language that, while removed from our current circumstances, continues to wield power. In this view, scripted literacy instruction, then, becomes a tool by which to deliver the script of the dominant class to socialize both teachers and students, which, in turn, serves to institutionalize the authoritative voice (Lee, 2007; McNeil, 2000a, 2000b).

In her study of a kindergarten classroom, Joanne Larson (2002) wrote about the ways decontextualized language arts packages used to teach discrete literacy skills impacted student learning, particularly in terms of how they shaped access to participation structures. She explained that in her classroom of study, the “discourse structure was limited to a strict IRE pattern that required that the students recite the teacher’s understanding of the text (Cazden,
2001; Gutierrez, 1993; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand, 1997)” (p. 83). These early, introductory experiences with literacy events are incredibly important in terms of supporting students’ long term development as readers and writers. Luke (2004) argues that, “While not the sole or determinate source, children’s introductions to literacy are defining moments in the shaping of capital” (p. 7).

To be clear, the processes by which the authoritative voice is institutionalized are not necessarily simple and one-dimensional. Indeed, as all texts are multidiscursive, dynamic and fluid (Luke, 1995-6), we must consider not only the forms of mediation that enable or constrain students’ access to literacy events, but the implications. In other words, what does it really mean for participation to be constrained? Cazden (2001) provides keen insight explaining,

> When we transform the authoritative discourse of others into our own words, it may start to lose its authority and become more open. We can test it, consider it a dialog—private and public—with other ideas, and ‘reaccentuate’ it (Bakhtin’s terms) in our own way” (p. 76).

There is an active dialogue that occurs when teachers and students encounter the authoritative voice; how scripted curricula mediate the introduction to the authoritative voice and support (or not) the continuation of a conversation outside the parameters of the script that represents the authoritative voice is key for understanding the complex ways these mandated programs function for teachers and students.

**Scripted Curricula: From the Beginning**

Our national discourse is imbued with messages of failing schools, failing teachers and failing students (students who, some rhetoric might claim, stand on the wrong side of the Achievement Gap). The state of public education, we are meant to believe, is in crisis. Inevitably, declaration of such an alleged crisis commands the attention of and invites response from parents, teachers, administrators, researchers, policy makers and, increasingly, wealthy
philanthropists. Economics and the political machine, which are not mutually exclusive, serve to amplify the voices that, ultimately, dominate and prevail at each shift in literacy ideology that, typically, occurs in tandem with an expressed need for reform and prescription for resolving the crisis of literacy, in particular.

Berliner & Biddle (1996) go so far as to name the discourse of the Reagan- and Bush-era campaigns that portrayed U.S. schools as deplorable a “Manufactured Crisis”. Some of the rhetoric surrounding that “manufactured crisis” and, certainly, the current crisis rhetoric surrounding education suggests there was a supposed time when student achievement in literacy was consistently flourishing. However, Mike Rose (1989) reminds us that as far back as the second half of the 1800’s, Ivy League faculty often lamented the literacy levels of their students, compelling one Harvard professor to proclaim, “Every year Harvard graduates a certain number of men whose manuscripts would disgrace a boy of twelve” (p. 5). It would seem that even among the 19th century educational elite there were students failing to meet the expected levels of achievement. As Rose points out, often such laments about student preparation are accompanied by reform agendas. So, it may come as no surprise that at the turn of the century the Progressive reform movement emerged, bringing with it a call to re-conceptualize literacy instruction.

The leader of the Progressives, John Dewey, advocated a more systematic approach to literacy instruction that taught children the social uses of literacy practices. This marked a shift toward a more humanist approach and away from a focus on mastering the 3 R’s through recitation models of teaching and learning. As the Progressive Movement gained momentum, so did the field of Educational Psychology influenced strongly by scholars E.L. Thorndike and his protégé, William S. Gray, whose research on scientific approaches to reading instruction shaped
the field for many decades. Textbook publishers employed Thorndike’s tenets of reading instruction with the first basal reading series introduced during the 1920’s (DeCastell and Luke, 1983). Shannon (2001) captures the prevailing ideology toward education in this post-WWI era and reveals assumptions about literacy that promoted the introduction of basal readers at that time, explaining, “These materials were the technology of reading instruction that would standardize teachers’ practices according to scientific principles in order to ensure efficiencies and quality control over student learning” (p. 17). Publishing companies such as Houghton-Mifflin and Scott Foresman responded to the emerging demand for basal readers, capitalizing on the opportunity to profit from the growing trend toward commodified literacy products, which marks a pivotal moment in the relationship between textbooks and teaching and learning. As Luke (1987) writes, “The historical end product of this...trend toward the mechanization of curriculum development is the standardized and mass-marketed curricular package, replete with teachers’ guides, worksheets, guidelines for testing, and other adjunct instructional materials: an exemplar of “technical form” (p. 97-98).

“Functional literacy” emerged as the hallmark of post-War literacy teaching and learning. Although “functional literacy” was originally coined by the U.S. Army during the 1930’s in reference to a recruit’s capability to understand instructions, wider audiences took notice when historian H. Covell denounced literacy levels in an assessment of our post-War era. He explained, “The shocking discovery that many of the young men in military service could not read adequately, and the impetus given the study of science by the discovery of nuclear energy and the space race have combined to result in a greater emphasis on the need for continuing instruction…of the specific skills needed in reading” (cited in de Castell and Luke, 1983, p. 100). A relatively ambiguous term, functional literacy was suggestive of minimal competency
with connotations of basic understanding and was established as a primary goal for literacy in the U.S. for more than thirty subsequent years.

Functional literacy, as it was defined during the 1940’s, was assumed to have been achieved upon completion of five years of schooling. A decade later, the benchmark was increased to sixth grade. Completion of eighth grade was the benchmark established during the 1960’s. By the 1970’s, the expectation for achieving functional literacy was completion of high school (Rose, 1989). The point, of course, is that the definition of literacy and the criteria by which it could be attained continued to evolve with each new decade. As the standard definition continued to change, policies and patterns of desegregation, integration, and immigration changed as well, bringing with them a felt need to accommodate the requirements of a growing pluralistic body of students. Ultimately, packaged programs were leveraged to provide what was assumed to be neutral literacy instruction that would provide the same literacy education for all students. However, these programs were introduced without addressing the much deeper economic, social, and institutional issues that emerged as the demographics of classrooms shifted and changed.

Another turning point occurred during the 1980’s, when public education came under fire with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. This report, published in 1983 by the National Commission of Excellence in Public Education under Ronald Reagan’s presidency, warned Americans, with a great sense of urgency, that, “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Many schools across the nation heeded the commission’s vague recommendations and followed the New Basics movement⁹ (a focus on

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⁹ New Basics refers here to the language written into *A Nation at Risk* (1983). While the five New Basics recommended in the report are described, quite vaguely, as four courses in English, three in math, three in science, three in social studies, and one-half credit in
standardized uniformity of curriculum) that emerged in the wake of the report. Opportunities emerged for publishing companies to package the presumed fail-safe materials that would protect the nation from feared educational mediocrity.

*A Nation at Risk* paved the way for the focus on content standards and aligned assessments that dominated educational reform in the 1990s. With this focus on state and national content area standards and assessments during the H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations, public education in the U.S. changed definitively in ways that led to current reform efforts. Concomitant with the introduction of the standards-based movement, Cross (2004) explains that “the concept of ‘scientifically based’ programs, specifically in the area of reading, took hold largely because of studies done since the 1980’s at the National Institute of Child Health and Development” (p. 124). Furthermore, Edmondson (2006) reminds us that “beginning with the Reading Excellence Act of 1996 (REA), Congress included language requiring that only programs based on ‘scientifically based reading research’ could be funded with federal dollars” (as cited in Allington, 2006). A continuation of these earlier federal actions and a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that grew out of Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty”, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed shortly after President George W. Bush was inaugurated in 2001. Messages of increased rigor and accountability as the expressed measures for assuring quality education for students, particularly poor and non-white students, that began during the 1990’s gained momentum in the wake of the passage of NCLB.

Across the 20th century of public schooling, an alleged reading crisis has been pervasive throughout each decade. As Rose (1989) writes, “We look to a past—one that never existed—for computer science as requirements for graduation, it is the notion of standardized uniformity that caught on across the country. This document is a keystone in the movement Berliner and Biddle (1996) have named *The Manufactured Crisis.*
the effective, no-nonsense pedagogy we assume that past must have had” (p. 7). Throughout our recent history of education, reform efforts emerged to reconcile the perceived mistakes of the movement that preceded them, which created opportunities for the publishing companies to mass-produce the Silver Bullet in the form of packaged curricula. Rose (1989) shares a quote from historians David Cohen and Barbara Neufeld that says, “The schools are a great theater in which we play out [the] conflicts in the culture” (p. 7). In this sense, the “reading crisis” might be viewed as a dramatization of the conflicts in U.S. culture. The “reading crisis” label is a myth; and myths, Berliner & Biddle (1995) posit, “lead to poor ideas for educational reform” (p. 7), no matter how well intended those ideas may be upon inception.

When public figures cite a “reading crisis”, particularly as such references are implicitly or explicitly linked to the rhetoric around the widely discussed Achievement Gap—defined by Ladson-Billings’ (2006) as a “term that refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students,” (p. 3)—there is a taken-for-granted understanding that students who struggle to read are not white, middle class and affluent children. In response to his own question, “Who are the children who do not fare well in early reading?” (p. 6), Jim Gee (2004) cites the findings of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children to discern that, indeed, “The majority are poor or come from minority groups whose members have faced a history of prejudice and oppression” (p. 6).

Importantly, whether or not the crisis of reading is accurately labeled loses significance when compared to the impact of the large-scale response to the perceived crisis. We must ask ourselves, what is the antidote we are providing for our marginalized students in their state of crisis? The 21st century trend for intervention strategies is to defer to scientifically-based reading
research (SBRR). Consequently, the students who are struggling the most are offered what Shannon (1989) describes as a steady diet of guidebook directed instruction.

**SBRR: The Driving-Force Behind Scripted Curricula**

The trend toward scientifically-based reading research that mobilizes the implementation of scripted curricula in so many schools indexes a current NCLB-era theme in federal discourse that privileges a narrow conception of scientific research. Erickson and Gutiérrez (2002) describe this brand of research as “the layperson’s ‘white coat’ notion of science” (p. 21) that undervalues qualitative research as a means to provide insight into educational outcomes and effectiveness. Moreover, the status of scientifically-based research must also be understood in terms of its relationship to standardized testing—an NCLB keystone—that shares an inextricable link with the dominant paradigm of what constitutes “scientific” evidence. Ultimately, as might be expected in a movement that assigns high value to the singular measure of a standardized test and adopts such narrow notions of literacy (reduced to reading skills) and science (limited to experimental analysis), children’s numerical test scores become the only currency (McNeil, 2000a).

Literacy can be understood as “an ideological practice caught up in power relations and anchored in the cultural meanings and practices of the dominant culture” (Pennington, 2004, p. 137). Thus, how we define literacy contributes both to how we determine who is literate and how we support those we believe are not. The definition of literacy embedded within a paradigm that endorses SBRR assumes what Moss (2005), in her response to the “scientific” of scientifically-based research, describes as a partial view that privileges “replicable causal effects (idealized in randomized experiments)” (p. 2) over meaning as interpreted and situated within particular social context.
When literacy standards reflect only the values and traditions of the dominant culture, the conditions are reflective of Street’s autonomous literacy model and, as Pennington (2004) argues, are akin to the colonial literacy model. She locates within this model an assumed need to “provide” literacy to a targeted community deemed illiterate. The community then “receives” the requisite technical information to become literate while also learning about the culture in what she terms an indoctrinating way. Local and social literacies surely exist prior to the intervention, however, they must be replaced with the literacies valued by the dominant culture in order for members of the community to be identified as literate. Conceptualizations of literacy that privilege only one narrow view have the potential to constrain learning, but, equally as important, also teach students to subvert their identities to those of the dominant culture (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). In this argument, the oft-cited literacy “crisis” is only averted when students surrender the cultural literacy practices they carry in exchange for the dominant language practices that are accepted as the singular standard.

In an attempt to “provide” literacy to all students, educational policy makers often espouse the one size fits all curricula marketed as the tool to achieve their goal. Uniformity is the key. Uniform principles of school reform are easily distributed from the top down in order to standardize teachers’ practices. Standardization of practice is, in turn, easily monitored and easily measured. SBRR is the contemporary iteration of the kinds of attempts to standardize practice that gave rise to basal readers at the turn of the 20th century. Similarly, SBRR continues to reinforce the relationship between standardization and commodification that also emerged at that time.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) report, a high-profile and controversial federal effort that presented very specific sets of skills and processes necessary for effective reading
instruction, created a demand for reading programs that align with the SBRR criteria. Large
publishing companies such as Houghton-Mifflin and McGraw-Hill were given an opportunity to
produce curricula that aligned with the NRP’s guidelines. As high-stakes testing has also become
an integral component of the current climate, the supply and demand relationship between
schools and textbook companies has grown. Many critical scholars have critiqued the
relationship of big business and education as undermining the democratic ideals of public
education. Of great concern is what Luke (2004) terms the “retrograde recommodification of
knowledge” (p. 128) that functions in tandem with a neoliberal agenda to create a culture of
surveillance that demands compliance with overt controls (Foucault, 1977; Davies, 2003;
MacGillivray, 2004).

The role of Reading First. Perhaps the most pronounced example of this deep-seated
dilemma is Reading First, a key component of NCLB. The expressed goal of the Reading First
program was to insure that all students were reading on grade level by the third grade. From
2002 – 2008 funds were granted to eligible schools that applied for federal assistance to meet this
primary objective. Eligibility for schools was determined by the percentages of students
receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), an indication of socioeconomic status. Eligibility was
also determined by a school’s reading program of choice. While NCLB encourages
scientifically-based reading research methods and materials, Reading First required that state
curricula align with the criteria of SBRR.

In 2002, according to the program’s website, 900 million dollars were appropriated to
Reading First, a trend that continued each year until 2008—the program’s final year—when
funding was cut by more than 60%. More than 6,000 elementary schools received Reading First
funds. In return, they espoused a packaged reading curriculum that met the SBRR-criteria.
While the *Reading First* program did not, officially, sanction a list of approved reading programs that met such criteria, lists could easily be found at the state level. A simple Google search of state department of education websites produces published lists of approved programs from which *Reading First* schools were mandated to choose. Among the list of core programs approved by U.S. states were Houghton-Mifflin, Harcourt School, Open Court/SRA, Scott Foresman and Macmillan McGraw-Hill. Although in theory the federal government was not mandating curricula, in practice very few programs were deemed eligible for funds by the standards outlined in the NRP report. Among this narrow list of programs, the scripted nature of the curricula varied from somewhat scripted to highly scripted.

**Scripted Curricula: Problematic for Teachers and Students**

The suggestion that teaching and learning can be reduced to a standardized set of practices is problematic for many reasons. Teacher autonomy is undermined (Apple, 1982; Luke, 2004; Shannon, 1987), the cultural capital each student brings into their classroom to make their experiences with learning unique is de-valued, narrow definitions of knowledge become legitimate (Davies, 2003; Moss, 2005), and learning is assumed to be a linear process that all children experience at the same rates and frequencies.

The de-skilling of teachers (Apple, 1982; Luke, 2004; Shannon, 1987, 1989, 1990) as a consequence of wide-scale implementation of scripted curricula has implications for both practice and for the profession, writ large. While it was Michael Apple (1982, 1986) who first introduced the notion of a de-skilled teacher, Patrick Shannon (1989, 1990) leveraged Apple’s argument to implicate basal programs, explicitly, illuminating the power relationships manifest in the processes of technical control that intervene with teachers’ responsibilities and opportunities for decision making processes around matters of teaching and learning. Debate
over the validity of this argument ensued when James Baumann (1992) published several critiques claiming that “the de-skilling argument is an oversimplification and fails to credit teachers with the intelligence and decision-making capabilities they possess” (p. 390), a counter-argument that, in my view, underestimates the constraints on teachers and misses the point that teachers and reading programs are situated within a larger socio-political context.

Throughout his critique, Baumann attributes both credit and blame to teachers who he writes, “were not particularly skilled prior to the advent of basal materials” (p. 394). Such flagrancy continues when Baumann suggests the de-skilling argument corroborates this point of view, writing, “there is a side to the deskill argument that suggests that teachers may not be quite clever enough to be discriminating consumers or users of instructional materials “(p. 395). In a published response, Shannon (1993) clearly states that Baumann’s argument is replete with misunderstandings and misinterpretations and, again, explains that basal reading programs are the manifestation of efforts to “rationalize” reading instruction, which is problematic for both teachers’ practice and students’ learning. And while Shannon’s argument certainly invokes the complexity of the issue, there remains a “do they or don’t they” question surrounding the ability of packaged reading programs to deny teachers their pedagogical expertise. To that end, the complexities are more intricate and prevalent than ever as the landscape of education is characterized by increasing technical and bureaucratic controls in the form of scripted programs and high-stakes assessments (to name just two). This raised questions for me about how to pursue a research agenda that attempts to understand how this tool did and did not, rather than did or did not, de-skill the teacher, in practice. While the SBRR-approved basal programs are imbued with a particular power that constrains teachers, the interactions between Norah, her students and the Mondo curriculum revealed the more nuanced ways power operated in her
school to impact teaching and learning.

Lee (2007) expresses some of the most salient tensions for teachers and students subject to the constraints of a system where only test scores count, explaining it “creates an environment that communicates that finding the right answer is paramount, that the sources of truth are in teachers and textbooks rather than a child’s mind, and that following prescribed procedures is the way to solve problems” (p. 40). Further, as McCarthey (2008) argues, “The emphasis on testing also caused stress and affected teachers’ sense of themselves as professionals” (p. 479). The stress contributes to fear and anxiety that Davies (2003) argues become useful for the system. Teachers are served “a volatile cocktail of accountability, compliance and work intensification that increases the allure” (Luke, 2004, p. 128) of prescribed, commodified instructional materials such as Mondo Bookshop.

Gutierrez et al. (2000) note that “these highly scripted and regulated programs strip teachers of their agency and expertise and serve to de-skill and de-professionalize them” (p. 11). Pease-Alvarez & Samway (2008) implicate No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for the role it plays in de-skilling by creating “a reform environment characterized by increased accountability via high-stakes standardized testing and packaged curricula” (p. 33). They note that literacy instruction in elementary classrooms, specifically, has been most profoundly impacted by these policy decisions. Literacy teaching and learning have been hijacked not only in the form of scripted commercial programs, but also test preparation and administration that further enforce their implementation. Pease-Alvarez & Samway’s research findings determine a loss of agency among educators subject to the imposition of scripted programs. They emphasize that “All the teachers [in their study] felt they had lost control over what and how they taught and, consequently, felt undermined and disrespected” (p. 36).
Of equal consequence is the potential impact of scripted curricula on the students, particularly when we consider the classrooms most vulnerable to the imposition of such programs. Gee (2001) asserts, “controversies over reading should have less to do with debates about method and instruction and more to do with understanding the links between poverty and (not) learning to read” (p. 8). There is no inherent difference between poor and affluent children that enables children of privilege to better learn fundamental reading skills. However, the belief that poor and non-white children must learn through rote practice of the basics persists.

Furthermore, researchers argue that this is a model of reform that also fails to disrupt relentless deficit thinking. Lee (2007) argues that there is a profound lack of understanding of the cultural displays of knowledge in the everyday practices of minority and low-income students—including students whose first language is other than academic English—that has led to a pervasive culture of low expectations, to deficit models of student capacities and to a myriad of misunderstandings within classrooms (p. 33).

Affording students limited opportunities to engage with meaningful literacy experiences restricts instances when young people may reveal the depth of their capacities, push back on deficit thinking, and connect with their own learning. Pease-Alvarez and Samway (2008) posit that “the current push to implement prescriptive reading curricula with low-income, low-performing student populations has the potential to increase educational inequities by constraining the opportunities to learn available to those students” (p.41). So it is that the uniform instruction imposed on under-performing schools and students actually perpetuates and sustains inequity.

McCarthey (2001) argues that “who we are depends on how others see us and that we are related to one another in complex ways as members of diverse cultural groups with historical and social roots that are being shaped and reshaped by everyday interactions” (p. 145). As she and others argue, exercises in standardization and control have the potential to undermine the
complexities that constitute who we are, depleting opportunities for students to foster multidimensional selves.

Dutro’s (2010) qualitative study of third graders in a high-poverty elementary school required to follow a district-mandated commercial reading curriculum is her “attempt to understand a convergence of curricular materials, policy, and children’s use of their lived knowledge—in this case, their knowledge of economic struggle—to connect to a text with which they were required to engage” (p. 256). Her classroom-based study also addressed the social and political milieus within which the teaching and learning context was situated. Her conceptual framework engaged perspectives on “teachers’ uses of commercial literacy curricula, critical approaches to discourse and research related to social class and literacy education and the ways in which poverty is constructed by the middle class” (p. 257). Grounded in this framework, Dutro was able to consider the ideologies that influenced decisions to mandate particular curricular materials, the assumptions embedded in those materials, the pedagogical decisions that shaped interactions between teachers, students and text, and the role of high-stakes assessments. She was able to develop a line of inquiry that supports an understanding of the ways this complex web of factors impacts children and their development as readers and writers.

Because her primary goal for analysis “was to dig beneath the surface of the language, content, and features of the curriculum, within a sociohistorical context that included both the policy context and the social and economic status of the city and this particular neighborhood” (p. 269), methods for analysis were derived from Critical Discourse Analysis. Analysis of the children’s written responses to a curricular prompt revealed that the students were able to construct deep meaning from the required text. Noteworthy, however, is that the inferences the children made were not among the text-bound inferences expected by the publishers of the
packaged curricula. As she explains, “The language and structure of the curriculum constructed an “expected reader,” which, in this case, was a class-privileged child” (p. 268). This raises questions not just about whether a curriculum should be used as a technological tool to control what students learn, but, more to the point, whether it can. The social and cultural dimensions of learning emerge in this example when the students engage experiences that fall outside those associated with a class-privileged child in order to draw meaning from a text.

A curriculum cannot ensure that learning will occur. However, curricula can address what is accepted as evidence of learning; what is seen as legitimate. In this example, “the children’s writing engaged the story thematically, aesthetically, and emotionally, while the curriculum’s focus on straightforward, text-bound inferences privileged far less sophisticated responses” (p. 281). This suggests that in this case the curriculum was not a tool for learning, but rather it was a tool for socializing students to the norms and values of the dominant class (Gutierrez et al., 1995; McNeil, 2000a, 2000b).

The dissonance between what publishers expect students to learn from a text and how students’ lived experiences interact with that text to support individual learning matters profoundly in a classroom where the teacher’s compliance with the program is mandatory. Teachers required to follow the scripted curricula may not have the tools to support students who respond in unexpected ways. Without the means to support alternative points of view, teachers are forced into complicity, privileging socialization over learning.

In many instances the impact of mandated compliance with a scripted program leaves teachers without the tools to support student learning, but also contributes to the previously referenced culture of fear represented in Dutro’s study. Sharon, the classroom teacher, “felt fearful and intimidated by the increased oversight and strict accountability…of NCLB” (p. 265),
a sentiment that frequently emerges in the literature. Whether constraints on teachers are material, intellectual or emotional, the findings in Dutro’s study point to the impact of standardized teaching and learning. The dominant voice is represented in the “official” curriculum pushing all other perspectives—the “unofficial”—to the margins, which, undoubtedly, has consequences for learning (Gutierrez et al, 1995, 1999).

Valencia et al. (2006) also offer a classroom-based qualitative study of the impact of scripted curricula, examining how novice “teachers developed conceptual understandings and practices for teaching reading as they engaged with a variety of curriculum tools” (p. 96). Grounded in a sociocultural theoretical framework, Valencia et al. focus on the social contexts of learning, following four teachers from one teacher training program into their first years of teaching in four different contexts asking questions about the ways curricular materials mediate student and teacher learning and how participation changes over time.

Their findings indicate that all four teachers used basal reading programs, but the way they used them and the expectations of school administration for how they should be used were unique to each teacher. The teachers with the most tentative knowledge of literacy and learning, Stephanie and Hannah, followed the day-to-day prescriptions of the programs most closely, accepting, even relying upon, the standardization of instruction. Stephanie’s school—the school with the highest percentages of students of color, students living in poverty and the lowest rates of achievement—mandated the curriculum. This is consistent with the literature supporting exacerbated inequity in achievement in the presence of scripted curriculum (Luke, 2004; Mathison and Freeman, 2003; McCutcheon, 2002; McNeil, 2000a, 2000b). Hannah’s school, a parochial school, did not mandate the curriculum. Dorothy and Charles, the teachers with the deepest knowledge of literacy, used the basal reader as but one tool in an entire repertoire.
Furthermore, when Dorothy and Charles included the basal reader in their teaching, they rarely followed the scripted instruction provided in the teacher’s manual.

Hannah and Stephanie were also the teachers who “focused on helping students complete tasks or assignments included in the curriculum materials instead of on student learning” (p. 103). The curriculum, in those classrooms, becomes the object of learning rather than a tool that can mediate learning, as in Dorothy and Charles’ classrooms. Compliance with the curriculum creates an illusion of control as teachers and students progress through a series of discrete tasks.

The most striking finding from Valencia et al.’s (2006) study is that, over time, teachers following a prescribed curriculum experience arrested pedagogical development described as “a constraining effect—an arrested development of teachers’ visions of effective reading programs and a limitation of their pedagogical repertoires” (p. 105). Stephanie and Hannah’s classrooms focused on a narrow view of teaching more than an expanded notion of learning. As their use of packaged literacy programs continued, they relied on the prescription for teaching instead of reflecting on their practice or student learning. As the authors explain, “Stephanie lacked the tools, knowledge, support, or latitude to move off her curricular course or to act on her concerns; she had become shackled to a narrow way of thinking and teaching” (Valencia et al, 2006, p. 113). In contrast, Dorothy and Charles continued to grow and develop as professionals. The controls over teaching and learning serve to stunt teachers’ development, which should be a primary point of concern for anyone interested in the future of the profession.

**Representations of Race and Class in Classrooms**

Also of deep concern in some research inquiries into the role of curricula, and certainly of relevance to my study, is how packaged literacy materials can essentialize difference. I use the term *essentialize* here to describe monolithic representations of race, class and gender that distill
membership in these groups down to an essential—a timeless, universal, context-free portrayal often grounded in inherent, biological characteristics—that reify stereotypes and reinforce power relationships.

Nieto (1992), citing a 1991 study conducted by Sleeter and Grant, states that while “textbooks now include more people of color and women, they continue to legitimize the status of White males” (p. 75). In other words, even when non-dominant students do find themselves included in the prescribed curriculum, “it is often through the distorted lens of the dominant group” (Nieto, 1992, p. 76). These are not choices that are benign, but rather are infused with messages about who holds power and who is valuable. On the effects of prescription, Freire (1970) writes “every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness” (p. 47). Thus, token portrayals of non-dominant people and communities by the dominant group can perpetuate stereotypes that serve to maintain a social order in which existing positions of power are fortified and legitimized.

Bruner (1990), quoting American poet Adrienne Rich, states, “When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing” (p. 32). If a child does not see him or herself in the context the system provides, the effects, I argue, can be devastating. Children must be afforded opportunities to connect with curricula in meaningful ways, whether to identify with the representations of lived experiences in the text or to critically analyze the absence of particular people and perspectives.

Moreover, excluding certain groups and life experiences from the pages of the anthologies in packaged reading curricula contributes to reification of an us/them dichotomy. Token
inclusions of non-dominant groups can serve to reinforce normalized whiteness, which, in turn, assigns all other races and cultures into a category of “them” or “Other” (Apple, 1993; Nieto, 1992). Categories of race, class, and gender intersect in complex ways and, in part, constitute and characterize our lived experiences in the social world (Collins, 2005). Essentialized representations mask these intricacies. Categorical labels give us the language to talk about who we are, how we identify and how we construct meaning from our experiences. These available categories are, simultaneously, so politically charged, indexing relationships of power and privilege (Foucault, 1977), that certain webs of intersections push particular individuals to the margins and deny them membership or access, particularly as it relates to schools and learning.

In her discussion of research on learning and development, specifically as it relates to students of color, literacy scholar Carol Lee (2002) emphasizes that she “sees no function to the system of racial classification used by the U.S. government or research community beyond the need for those who classify themselves as white to maintain a hegemonic position vis-à-vis others” (p. 284). If the socially constructed categories of race, class and gender are narrow and reductionist for the purpose of keeping hierarchies in place then questions about how to negotiate these categories in the discourse around education and education reform emerge. In order to create equitable opportunities for all children, there are complexities present at the site of particular intersections of race, class, and gender that must be part of the discourse—scripted or otherwise—about teaching and learning.

**From Categories to Practices and Searching for Authenticity**

Anthropologist John L. Jackson (2001) provides a nuanced account of day-to-day life in Harlem, a space he describes as “a kind of ‘quotation-marked-off place’,” (p. 19) that is emblematic of what it means to live within that particular neighborhood and to be Black in
America. His ethnographic account reveals a dynamic, ever-changing emblem he labels Harlemworld that has experienced as many ongoing reconfigurations as the physical, social space of Harlem that it represents. Harlem, an emblem and the “capital of Black America”, is portrayed as a more racially and socioeconomically diverse place than its legacy leads us to believe, which problematizes the very notion that there exists a singular definition of what it means to be Black in America. He illuminates the futility in distilling the contemporary Black experience into an essentialized, reductionist narrative as is so common in the anthologies of packaged reading programs.

There are shared histories and shared experiences of import among the people of Harlem whose stories Johnson profiles, but it is the practices of the people that emerge as important points of analysis. In line with Lee’s challenge to the prevailing system of racial classification, Jackson (2001) explains that “If people define racial differences as a function of what individuals do, then racial essentialism can be slowly undone by challenging the behaviors that others invoke to explain social hierarchies of all stripes” (p. 232). This work resonates with a call for moving away from static essentialism and towards perspectives that adopt a more dynamic point of view that examines individual practices.

Proceeding from a framework that focuses on practices enables the researcher to see both regularity and variance within groups. The goal, Lee (2002) reminds us, is not to “lose the consistencies in patterns of practice and belief systems that do have regularity within communities” (p. 285), but rather to transcend assumptions that membership in categories of race, class and gender is simply inherited or signifies a set of static traits. Lee’s (2001, 2007) work with urban high school students provides an example of the ways she engages this proposed framework to examine race and learning. Leveraging the African American English
Vernacular language practices patterned across her students, Lee (2001) offers “a fertile bridge for scaffolding literary response, rather than a deficit to be overcome” (p. 101). Her analysis examines how, over time, the students were “apprenticed into a community of intellectual inquiry…that demanded close textual analysis” (p. 121). She “privileges sources of knowledge that the students recognize are devalued by schools,” (Lee, 2007, p. 26) to create participation structures that support their identity development as members of that classroom practice (Nasir, 2008). She sees what the students do, as Jackson also so strongly recommends, and uses it to support meaningful literacy teaching and learning.

There is the possibility of authenticity in Lee’s literacy model. While we know that monolithic accounts of what it means to be a member of a racial category are inauthentic, there is still so much question as to what an authentic representation looks like. Trite portrayals of non-dominant groups in scripted reading programs bound in hardcopy and mass distributed to our most struggling schools do not successfully answer this question, but Lee’s classroom model may.

Lee’s Cultural Modeling framework of teaching leverages the everyday knowledge students bring into the classroom to address the demands of subject matter learning. She argues, explicitly, that direct instruction and basic skills practice are insufficient and offers an alternative that is based, fundamentally, on what she labels, “cultural data sets”. Cultural data sets are derived from the students’ very real day-to-day interactions rather than a fixed set of characteristics imposed onto the students. Their “cultural data sets provide familiar models on which new learning can be anchored” (Lee, 2007, p. 35). Learning that, undoubtedly, comes to the fore in a low-income, inner-city high school showcased in Lee’s case study. Students with long-standing records of low-achievement and poor test scores read Toni Morrison novels and
participate in dynamic classroom discussion over the course of the school year. To understand student progress, Lee designed assessments that would allow her to see trajectories of growth—information often missed by traditional assessments which privilege particular displays of knowledge as evidence of learning.

The Inherent Hybridity of Classrooms

The notion of hybridity is of central importance to my study as both literacy and learning spaces have been theorized in the literature as inherently hybrid. In a discussion of the New Literacy Studies (NLS), Street (2003) argues that literacy is always a hybrid of the local and the global: “It is the recognition of this hybridity that lies at the heart of an NLS approach to literacy acquisition regarding the relationship between local literacy practices and those of school” (p. 80). The classroom examples Carol Lee shares provide insight into how the hybrid of local and school-based language and literacy practices can be harnessed for robust learning. And while Lee’s careful and purposeful curricular design leverages hybridity with intention, it should be understood that all classrooms are hybrid whether the organization of learning accounts for it or not. In support of this understanding and based on empirical work in both elementary and secondary and formal and informal classroom settings, Gutierrez et al. (1999) posit “learning contexts are immanently hybrid, that is, polycontextual, multivoiced and multiscipted. Thus conflict, tension, and diversity are intrinsic to learning spaces” (p. 287). It seems impossible that the pre-determined scripts of a one-size-fits-all curricula could—or even would given the script’s alignment with SBRR—fully anticipate the conflicts and diversity that inevitably arise within classrooms; each one with its own unique form of hybridity.

And while scripted literacy instruction certainly seems likely to constrain teachers’ opportunities to strategically leverage hybridity, the curricular materials are not automatically
and inevitably subversive. The materials are not capable of simply replacing teachers’ beliefs with a belief system derived from and aligned with more conventional dominant values. They may shape teachers’ points of view, but the influence is more complicated than that. Thus, when teachers use the scripted curricular materials as tools for teaching, the effect certainly may not be the production of docile, conformist students. Instead, the processes that occur in the classroom seem likely to be more dynamic with opportunities for resistance located within the liminal and hybrid spaces students and teachers negotiate.

McCarthey & Moje (2002) argue that “identity can be hybrid, it can be complex and it can be fluid and shifting as a person moves from space to space and relationship to relationship.” (p. 231). The hybrid nature of identities is highlighted through the lens of postcolonialist thought. Rizvi, Lingard and Lava (2006) paraphrase Bhabha stating, “identity then is always ‘hybrid’, produced performatively in contexts that can be either agnostic or affiliative” (p. 253). In these contexts, colonizer and colonized are mutually constituted and inextricably linked. Thus, while teachers may be colonized by the policies that require the implementation of one-dimensional texts, they are also complicit as the very teaching of these texts can be seen as a colonizing practice.

MacGillivray et al. (2004) argue that teachers simultaneously become the colonized and the colonizers when packaged reading programs are imposed by mandate. Their experiences as colonized are labeled, categorically, as “redefined, restricted, and subsumed” (p. 133). These three categories illuminate the role packaged reading programs play in creating and maintaining an inequitable social order. Opportunities for critical pedagogy and, consequently, praxis, are undermined, which has consequences for both teachers and students.

The authors use the term redefined to label the colonizer’s attempt to recreate the identity
of the colonized and reinforce the system that maintains this identity. In the instance of packaged reading programs, the identities of the teachers are prescribed by the programs just as definitively as the identities of the students are portrayed one dimensionally in the texts. There are few opportunities for either students or teachers to explore complexity through the stories on the page or to question the system that is perpetuating stereotypical roles for teachers and non-dominant students.

*Restricted* refers to the limited freedoms teachers enjoy once they are colonized by the reading programs. “Possibilities for autonomy are narrowed” (p. 134). Essentially, the packaged reading program is derived from a particular ideology—an ideology that aligns with the dominant class—and the teachers are restricted to utilizing the program in ways that maintain this alignment.

Over time, redefined identities and restrictions on teaching begin to mutually reinforce each other in what the authors term, *subsumed*. The colonizing practice (imposing scripted reading curricula) creates a scenario in which the colonized (the teachers) come to depend on the colonizers for a definition of what is normative, what is expected.

To extend the argument further, I draw on post-colonialist scholar Edward Said (2005) who writes

> Works of literature are not merely texts. They are in fact differently constituted and have different values. Great authoritarian uprisings made their greatest advances not by denying the humanitarian and universalist claims of the general dominant culture, but by attacking the adherent of that culture for failing to uphold their own declared standards, for failing to extend them to all, as opposed to a small fraction, of humanity. (p. 460)

Essentially, adherents to the general dominant culture who advocate for the inclusion of scripted curricula should be held responsible for the material’s failure to engage the complexities of identity and experience.
Conclusion

As literacy scholars have emphasized, the status quo, in the case of literacy teaching and learning, is a stratified system that provides meaningful curricula and enables reflective teachers for a privileged class of students while simultaneously offering low-income, low-performing students packaged reading programs and constrained educators. When instruction is designed to limit students’ literacy learning to basic skills rather than critical thinking and judgment, it contributes to preservation of the social order (Macedo, 1993). Opportunities for critical thinking erode and the status quo is maintained.

Shannon (1992) addresses this contention writing

Schools work primarily to reproduce the current economic and social conditions in society by providing middle- and upper-class children with preferential treatment—more freedom and higher levels of information—and by offering lower-class children highly controlled lessons concerning basic skills (p.128).

Moreover, Allington (2002) reminds us not to take for granted how deeply embedded this practice really is, raising the concern that “funding to buy these programs is now codified into federal law even in the face of evidence of the ineffectiveness of these approaches” (p. 30). Also not to be taken for granted is how deeply students may be affected by this imbalanced system.

Tyson (1999) shares the story of a fifth grader who, when asked why he appeared disinterested in the story selections, responded, “There ain’t no Little Red in my ‘hood and if I catch one of ‘dem little piggies, I’m gon’ have a Bar-B-Que” (p. 155). I would render a guess that every teacher has had the experience of being humbled by a student’s humor and candor. This student’s response is, surely, outside the set of anticipated responses included the script that accompanies an anthology including traditional fairy tales. A teacher may capitalize on this response and engage the student in a conversation that encourages critical thinking. But, a teacher required to follow a reading program may not be equipped or even “allowed” to do so.
Instead, she may divert the conversation back to the dominant script and squander an opportunity for critical conversation and exploration of how meaning is interpreted. Over time, these choices that shape the social interaction of classrooms have a cumulative effect on children’s capacities. As Davies and Harre (1990) emphasize, “An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 89). My goal was to examine these very processes of social interaction within Norah’s fifth grade classroom drawing on the methodological tools described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
Research Methods

“To be of value, it is suggested, ethnographic research should be concerned not simply with understanding the world but with applying its findings to bring about change.” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 14)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop rich understandings of the ways a packaged reading program mediated teaching and learning in an elementary classroom context. How did the reading program matter in the day-to-day teaching lives of the focal teacher, Norah, and her students? In this chapter, I describe how I engaged in a process of inquiry guided by this fundamental question, cataloging the steps of study design, data collection, and analysis I followed.

My intention is to articulate how the methodological choices I made aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of my study, but also reflected my support for teachers, students and interests in equity. Maxwell (2005) reminds us that, in qualitative study, the researcher is the research instrument where our “eyes and ears are the tools that make sense of what is going on” (p. 79). My study design and implementation grew out of my own socio-theoretical understandings and philosophical beliefs about teaching, learning, students, and teachers. My goal is to present a description of methods that explains the procedural steps I followed to collect and analyze data, but also captures the iterative nature of those steps. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) write, “Initial interests and questions that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even transformed over the course of the research” (p. 3). Thus, I weave, throughout this chapter discussion of how one step informed the next and how the emergence of new understandings and unexpected challenges shaped the direction of my study.
Research Questions

1. How does the Mondo reading program mediate literacy teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom?

2. What conceptualizations of teaching and learning are present in the language of the curriculum?

3. How do teacher and student negotiations of those discourses, in the context of larger accountability policies, shape students’ access to and participation in literacy learning?

The first research question I proposed asked, broadly, how the presence of the Mondo program intervened in processes of teaching and learning in the focal classroom. Drawing from my sociocultural assumptions that literacy is a social practice and learning is always socially mediated, I wanted to know how this specific tool shaped the events and activities that constituted literacy instruction. My theoretical framing also sees teaching and learning as inextricably linked, so my focus was on both the teaching practices prescribed by the Mondo program and the ways the Mondo program was part of the social organization of learning in Norah’s classroom.

The second research question was designed to support my understandings of the how beneath the ways Mondo mediated teaching and learning. Within any packaged program are messages about what counts at teaching, as learning, and as literacy. I wanted to uncover those beliefs and assumptions about teaching, learning, and literacy embedded within Mondo. My thinking was that I could identify the aspects of teaching and learning that were mediated by Mondo through observation of classroom activity. But, in order to understand what was accomplished and how Mondo came to operate in particular ways, I needed to leverage the post-structural theories of language elaborated in my theoretical framework to examine the language
of the curriculum. This would enable me to unearth the conceptualizations of literacy, teaching and learning that were present and underscoring mediated classroom activity.

Lastly, the third question was drawn both from my theoretical framework and from my interest in equity. The Mondo program was mandated by the school district and, to a lesser extent, the school. I wondered how Norah’s accountability to the school and district mandate manifested in terms of her compliance with or resistance to the program. I knew that Norah was a teacher who sometimes did and sometimes did not ‘follow’ Mondo as it was prescribed, so I wondered what this negotiation looked like and how control was exercised in the school and district context to either enable or constrain her negotiations.

Furthermore, packaged reading programs are critiqued for offering an autonomous model of literacy which stands in contrast with the social practice view of literacy informing my work. Thus, I wondered if and how compliance with the (presumably) autonomous model of literacy embedded in the Mondo curriculum created opportunities for students to engage with robust literacy practices. Limited access to meaningful literacy learning has implications for students who are on the receiving end of reductive, skill & drill approaches to reading instruction. Focusing on the interaction between the teacher and the school and district contexts mandating her fidelity to a reading program would enable me to shift my focus from the teacher to the system of which she is a part and consider how systemic structures were enriching or impoverishing children’s opportunities to be learners of literacy.

**Methodological Tools**

In order to investigate Norah’s classroom as a site of literacy learning mediated by the Mondo program which presented a conceptualization of literacy, teaching, and learning that was ultimately privileged by the school and district mandating the program’s use, I leveraged the
methodological tools that ethnographic and participant observation frameworks of analysis made available.

**Ethnography**

The long and complex history preceding my use of the term *ethnography* gives me cause to be clear in my definition. I borrow Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995) definition of ethnographic methods as “An integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture” (p. 1). My study was ethnographic in the sense that I examined, in-depth, the teacher and student interactions around a mandated packaged reading program, Mondo *Bookshop*, within the everyday context of one fifth grade classroom setting for six months. Further, I gathered a range of data sources (e.g. fieldnotes, audio recordings of instructional planning meetings and classroom instruction, student work samples and curricular artifacts. For a detailed list of data source see Appendix A). I conducted an analysis of these data that was an “interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices and these are implicated in the local and perhaps wider contexts” (p. 3). In other words, my analysis was, in ethnographic terms, specific to my study, an interpretation of 1.) how the Mondo reading program functioned in Norah’s classroom; 2.) the consequences for her and the students and; 3.) how this classroom-based phenomenon shaped and, as I discussed in chapters 1 and 2, was shaped by the materially- and ideologically-mediated school and district contexts in which it played out.

**Interpretative Inquiry and Participant Observation**

I entered into my field site as a participant observer, thus I situate the discussion of this methodology within the framework of interpretive inquiry. Erickson (1986) uses the term “interpretive” to encompass varied approaches to participant observation, which includes, by his
own definition and for the purposes of my study, ethnography. Participant observation within the interpretive framework—a framework distinct from participation observation within other paradigms—is defined by Holy (1984) as connected with a “theory of social facts as constructions” (p. 27). This methodological approach assumes that meaning and interpretation are situated within social contexts, but of significance here is who is responsible for doing the interpreting. As a researcher entering into Norah’s classroom, I observed the teacher-student interactions around literacy, as well as interpreted their meanings.

Further, Holy (1984) explains, “in an interpretive social science, the validity of the researchers’ account is not tested against the corpus of scientific knowledge. It is tested against the everyday experience of the community of people” (p. 30). The classroom community or, in terms aligned with the theoretical framing of this study, the entire system of activity that includes Norah, her students, mediating tools, the object of literacy learning, rules and norms and division of labor are of central importance to the validity of interpretation. The actions I observed during data collection were necessarily contextualized within the socially organized learning community that attached meaning to them.

**Talk and interaction.** To the point that learning is a social phenomenon, not an accomplishment that occurs in the minds of individuals, meaning making happens in interaction. In the case of contexts of learning, teachers and students mutually influence interactions with each other in what Erickson (1996) calls the social interactional ecology. Integral to this ecology is language. Language, as Erickson (2004) explains, is “a cultural tool for doing the work of speaking and understanding what others are saying” (p. 14). With this in mind, talk and interaction were central foci of my study as I attempted to garner an understanding of the role the
Mondo program played in the social interactional ecology of Norah’s classroom, school, and district.

More specifically, *discourse* “highlights the ways in which knowledge is constructed and exchanged in classrooms” and is “formed, collectively, by teachers, students and tools” (Ball, 1991, p. 44). Discourse patterns formed in interactions create structures for participation (Erickson, 1996) for both the students and teachers. Within the cultural-historical tradition, learning is observed as shifts in participation over time (Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, opportunities to construct meaning and exchange knowledge support learning and development. Examining discourse, particularly in terms of how the Mondo program shaped 1.) the teacher’s talk in the planning of instruction and 2.) the children’s access to participation in a range of literacy events, provided insight into how the Mondo program mediated teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom.

Further, turning attention to the bigger picture within which Norah’s classroom was set, Erickson (2004) writes “language is both a local process and global one” (p. 107) pointing to the relations of mutual influence between these two dimensions for which a study of language must account. Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1977; Luke, 1995-6), to be explicated in the following section, offers a set of methodological tools useful for building understandings of this local-global relationship.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

In his discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Allan Luke (1995-6) identifies a need to examine “how broader formations of discourse and power are manifest in the everyday, quotidian aspects of texts in use.” (p. 11). The value of this approach is that everyday classroom texts are destabilized, no longer taken for granted in form or authority. Texts are any forms of
representation thus they may be written or spoken. In the specific context of Norah’s classroom, the texts included the Mondo program, school- and district-provided tools and templates to support the use of the mandated Mondo program and the texts produced by the children through verbal and written responses. Expounding upon the possibilities CDA creates for examining the relationship between language and power, Luke also writes that CDA “fits well with the imperatives of a critical sociology of education, to document how larger patterns of social reproduction and cultural representation occur in everyday classroom life” (p. 11). He is explicit about the steps researchers can take in order to leverage CDA in ways that advance a critical sociology of education agenda, referencing opportunities to model interpretations of texts that run counter to the privileged interpretation; illuminate the ways textual representations can position particular people and groups; and, lastly, problematize the hegemonic function of certain texts. Importantly, CDA provides a set of tools that can illuminate the powerful role texts play to exercise surveillance over classrooms and teachers (Davies, 2003; Foucault, 1977; Luke, 2004). For example, an analysis of the templates the school provided for the teachers to plan reading instruction was useful for illuminating the school and district assumptions about literacy and learning which, in turn, were received and taken up by the teachers.

Although some theories of power and discourse have been critiqued as overly deterministic, I find Allan Luke’s introduction of Critical Discourse Analysis into the field of education invaluable as it concerns the ways packaged literacy programs are imbued with power such that they are capable of granting or denying learners access to literacy practices. Luke (1995-6) posits that “analyses of language, text, and discourse can address issues of educational access to cultural and economic, symbolic and material resources” (p. 7), a claim that resonates with ideas in cultural-historical theories and research. The stratification of access and resources
is, after all, undeniably raced and classed, which requires the attention of researchers with a focus on social justice.

A packaged reading program and the tools a school and district provide to support the mandated use of that reading program created a script that is positioned as an “authoritative text” that portrays itself to be singular and all knowing, commanding subordination from schools, teachers and students. As Bakhtin (1981) defines it, “the authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher…we encounter it with an authority already fused to it” (p. 342). There is a prescription imposed from that distanced zone, a prescription that may seem normative, but requires the de-naturalization that CDA makes possible.

However, when these prescribed authoritative texts mediate participation in classrooms, the intersection of texts and teacher must be accounted for. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this space as a “contact zone where we struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority” (p. 345). An analysis of the complex processes that occur in these zones—how teachers and students take up the texts (particularly as they relate to portrayals of race and class), the way participation structures are created or closed, the patterns of meaning making, and the shifts that occur over time—are as important as analysis of the textual features, themselves.

Ball and Freedman (2004) note “classrooms…are most often characterized by monologic forms of discourse and participation structures that deny learners roles and valid voices in these settings” (p. 175). However, drawing on Griffin and Mehan (1981), Cazden (2001) reminds us of the agency that is possible in classroom contact zones, writing, “classroom discourse can be characterized as ‘negotiated conventions—spontaneous improvisations on basic patterns of interaction”’ (p. 39). Leveraging the methodological tools of CDA to examine the authoritative
discourse and positioning power of mandated texts as well as the analytical tools offered by an interpretive inquiry of classroom discourse and interaction, I approached my analysis ready to examine the complex interaction that unfolded when a mandated program attempted to dictate the social processes of actual teaching and learning that are too fluid, dynamic and multi-vocal to be controlled.

**Setting and Participants**

**Study Setting**

The focal site of my study was a fifth grade classroom at Lazarus Elementary School, a high-poverty urban elementary school located in the Alba School District in a western region of the United States. The student population of Lazarus was approximately 400 students in grades K through 5. Gaining access to a classroom where I would be able collect data for my study presented challenges. The urban setting was centrally important to my research focus, however, I needed to identify a city school district that also required compliance with a packaged literacy program. Furthermore, logistically, I needed this urban district that mandated a packaged reading program to be in close proximity to my home or university because at the time I was working on my dissertation I was also enrolled in courses as well as working as a research assistant and course instructor. Once I found a school district that met my criteria, I then needed to establish a relationship with a teacher who was comfortable participating in my study. I learned many lessons about negotiating access into schools and came to value the opportunity I was presented when, finally, I gained entry into the Alba School District and, subsequently, Lazarus Elementary School.

In compliance with Alba School District mandates, Lazarus required K through five teachers to follow a packaged program—Mondo *Bookshop*—for reading instruction at the elementary level. According to the 2010 US Census, with its population of more than 300,000
people, the city within which the Alba School District is located is designated a large city that I believed represented the racial, ethnic, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity centrally important to my research interests. Indexing district demographics, more than 90% of Lazarus students identified as students of color (see Table 1), 85% received free/reduced lunch, and 52% were labeled English Language Learners. The Lazarus school setting was well-suited for my study of teaching, learning, and a mandated reading program in a school serving high numbers of students of color and those from economically struggling families. To provide further details about the school context, according to the school’s 2007-2008 Accountability Report, the number of students eligible to receive free and reduced lunch steadily increases each year, from 66.5 % during the 2005-2006 school year, 70.1 % during 2006-2007 and 77.2 % in 2007-2008. The school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in math or reading.

Table 1. School and District Racial Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Two or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alba School District</td>
<td>36,297</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazarus Elementary</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study Participants

Teacher. My faculty advisor in the Literacy Studies department, Dr. Elizabeth Dutro, introduced me to the focal teacher, Norah, after the Alba School District approved my research study. The district approved my study, which granted me permission, but not support to contact potential partner school sites. So, I researched school profiles and reached out to numerous principals, however, the process was long and slow for two reasons. First, I was working during the summer months when most school personnel were unavailable and, second, many schools in
the district were in transition with new principals just assuming their leadership roles. They were friendly and willing to talk with me, but reluctant to embark on research collaborations, just yet.

Elizabeth recalled that a former student, Norah, who she taught in the university Master’s program, was a fifth grade teacher in the Alba District. She connected us by e-mail, which created the opportunity for me to work with Norah in her classroom at Lazarus. The affordances of this arrangement included Norah’s basic familiarity with Elizabeth’s perspective on literacy and learning which shares many points of connection with the theoretical framing I brought to this study. I felt, upon introduction, that Norah understood the goal of my project was to examine the role Mondo played in teaching and learning while, simultaneously, also understanding my goal was not to critique her or her instruction. Additionally, Norah had graduated with an MA degree at the university where I was a doctoral candidate, which suggested I may have some insight into the training and preparation Norah received during her teacher education. I felt the grade level was also an affordance as I was familiar with fifth grade curriculum and instruction from my own experiences as a grade five teacher. Further, the implications of arguments drawn from an analysis of reading instruction in a fifth grade classroom had the greatest potential for pushing on understandings of reading instruction that privileges comprehension. Comprehension, I believed, is an issue of relevance across elementary and secondary schooling, more than decoding, which one would expect to be the emphasis in primary grade classrooms.

The constraint was that I did not have an established relationship with Norah prior to data collection nor did I know the culture or routine practices of her classroom or the school. I figured some things out in the process of collecting data that I wished I had known sooner as they would have informed revisions to my study design. While my learning curve was due, in part, to the first-time independent research project experience of graduate school, I imagine even three
months in Norah’s classroom leading up to data collection would have informed a small number of changes to what information I collected, how and with what frequency. For example, mid-way through data collection I noticed the language structure, the fill-in-the blank sentence frame students used to respond to text, was a key feature of reading instruction in Norah’s classroom. Familiarity with the classroom (and the school and district expectations around using the language structures) might have set me up to collect the information that could have supported further analysis of how the language structures shaped students’ responses to text. For instance, I might have requested access to the professional development sessions the school and district provided the teachers to support their use of language structures.

At the time of data collection, Norah was in her fifth year as a teacher, all five as a faculty member at Lazarus. The other two teachers on the fifth grade team—Jamie, a veteran teacher with more than 30 years of experience who retired the same month data collection concluded and Blake, an experienced teacher with a special interest and expertise in reading, writing and children’s literature—participated in the study to the extent that they agreed to be audio-recorded during weekly planning meetings. Additionally, Emma, the district literacy coach, also agreed to be audio-recorded when she attended weekly planning meetings and participated in an interview about reading curriculum and instruction in the Alba district.

**Students.** Of the 18 students enrolled in Norah’s fifth grade class at Lazarus, 14 students (seven girls and seven boys) agreed to participation in the study. The 14 participating students ranged in age from 10 to 12 years old and while no information was collected to identify students by their race, ethnicity or family income level, Norah’s students represented the makeup of the school presented in Table 1 above.
**Researcher.** I include myself in the overview of study participants since the researcher’s own subjectivities cannot be extracted from the research process. I use subjectivities here as Peshkin (1988) defines it, “an amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p. 17). In this vein, I identify as a white, middle class, female from the Northeast region of the United States. The middle child and oldest daughter in a family of three children, I was raised by my mother, a public school teacher, and my father—a product of private schooling, orphanages and the U.S. foster care system—whose career in business followed many years as a blue-collar worker. While my upbringing certainly reflects middle-class values, primarily, perspectives that might be characterized as working class also contributed to my point-of-view, which lends complexity to my membership in the middle-class.

At the time of data collection and analysis I was a doctoral level graduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. My own educational trajectory includes K-12 public school, followed by a small private college in Upstate New York and a mid-sized public university in the Southeast. I entered teaching as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education where I simultaneously spent an entire academic year in a kindergarten classroom of a Philadelphia public-university partnership school. My degree program was proceeded by three years as a fifth grade teacher in an urban school in central Massachusetts where *Open Court* was the required curriculum for reading and writing instruction.

**Data Collection**

For the data collection phase of my study in Norah’s classroom, I drew on a range of strategies for ethnographic data collection in order to gather a variety of data sources. The data sources and collection methods discussed here represent the diversity of methods and sources I
believed would both assure that as much information as possible was captured in regards to how Mondo impacted teaching and learning and in anticipation of triangulating these sources (Denzen, 1978) during analysis. Although in the following section, I discuss how I engaged in data reduction and analysis of the very large corpus of data collected from my study, here I describe the full range of sources that informed my research. Data were drawn from the following information sources (see Appendix A for a complete list) from October through April: 1) Twenty seven fieldnotes written during weekly participant observations of whole and small group reading instruction in the focal classroom; 2) Seventeen audio-recordings of cycles of whole and small group reading instruction in the focal classroom; 3) Nine video-recordings of cycles of whole and small group reading instruction in the focal classroom; 4) Thirteen fieldnotes written during weekly participant observations of the fifth grade instructional team’s planning meetings; 5) Eleven audio-recordings of the fifth grade instructional team’s weekly planning meetings; 6) Sixteen audio-recorded interviews including two interviews with the focal teacher at the beginning and end of the study, respectively, one interview with the literacy coach, and one interview with each of the 14 participating students; 7) Reading response journals for each of the 14 participating students; 8) Grades, state test scores and Mondo reading assessment scores for each of the 14 participating students; 9) Mondo and teacher-created reading curricular materials including Mondo Teaching Guides and Promethean Board “flip charts” for 15 of the stories taught during participant observations; 10) Teacher-created instructional plans for 15 of the stories taught during participant observations; and 11) District documents related to reading curriculum, instruction and assessment at the local and state levels.

During the data collection phase of my study, I visited Norah’s classroom weekly, at first during both reading and writing blocks. Of interest, these blocks were truncated with reading
scheduled during the mornings and writing scheduled later in the day after lunch, specials and the required ‘language’ block. The school followed Mondo for reading and Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study for writing. I had to make a decision early on in the data collection about whether I would collect data for both reading and writing and, if I decided to focus on just one or the other, which I would choose and be strategic about why.

In my own life and under the auspices of the literacy as social practice perspective, reading and writing are not mutually exclusive subjects of study, rather they are both part of the tool kit that is literacy. However, in Norah’s classroom they were taught separately. I selected reading simply because the policy climate around reading is more contentious than the climate surrounding the teaching and learning of writing; thus understanding how the “hot button” nature of the reading issue had implications for kids and teachers felt important to me. Secondly, I suspected that Mondo was more rigid and scripted than Lucy Calkins’ writing program and it was my goal to understand how teachers respond to tools that are highly constraining. So, I decided to focus data collection on reading. In addition to the reading block, I also attended the fifth grade team’s weekly instructional planning meeting.

**Classroom Observations.** As a participant observer in the field site classroom, I wrote extensive observational fieldnotes sometimes by hand, sometimes on a laptop computer in order to document the classroom activities I both observed and participated in during the reading block. Because there is little consensus as to what constitutes an ethnographic field note (Emerson et al, 1995; Sanjek, 1990), I referred to LeCompte and Schensul (1999) for their discussion of the qualities of useful, accurate observational notes which includes keeping detailed, low-inference notes that document what was observed as if I had seen it through the lens of a camera rather than attributing meaning to what was observed. They note that “inference
and personal observations, reflections, hunches and emotional reactions of the field researcher can be recorded separately from the stream of fieldnotes that describes the event or situation” (p. 116). This idea connects to what Gutierrez and Vossoughi (2010) refer to as Observer Comments in the fieldnote, or cognitive ethnography, template that they use as a mediating tool for undergraduate learning at UCLA (a tool that has traveled to the EDUC 4411 Educational Psychology for Elementary Schools: Learning in Robust Ecologies course at the University of Colorado for which I was both a Teaching Assistant and Lead Instructor).

My fieldnotes recorded practices such as how Norah and her students interacted with both Mondo and non-Mondo texts attending to the details of what they said and did during reading instruction. For example, how were questions about the shared texts posed to students by Norah, how did the students respond to the questions, who talked, how did they get the floor, and how did Norah or the other students respond? Generally, my intention was to develop a deep, overall sense of the learning ecology in the classroom through the process of documenting and reflecting on my fieldnotes. I realize they also, inevitably, reflected my own orientation to the social, interactional processes that occur in classrooms.

In addition to field notes, some classroom instruction was documented by videotape. Specifically, I selected one cycle of whole group instruction to videotape and two cycles of small group instruction. Videotape data seemed useful for the focus on both talk and other the forms of behavior and communication that, when attended to, can enrich analysis. To this point, Goldman (2007) writes, “Not until the discourse is dissected and aligned with the behavioral record, one act at a time, and across time, can the opinions and biases of initial viewing give way to more empirically demonstrable accounts” (p. 11) I used video recording to document Norah’s and the
students’ interactions, both in terms of what discourse patterns emerged and the non-verbal behaviors enacted.

Using a video camera to collect classroom data was a point of learning for me as I recognized, through processes of analysis, steps I could have and would have taken differently. For example, the camera was always set up behind the students facing the Promethean Board where the texts where actually projected and Norah who always sat at a small desk adjacent to the board and read the text aloud. The students sat on the carpet facing Norah and the Promethean Board, so the camera angles did not capture their faces. I tried to set the cameras up to the sides of the carpet in order to record the children’s faces, however, it seemed important, at the time, to include the Promethean Board where the text was projected since the texts were a key point of analysis. In retrospect, I realize I should have used two cameras on tripods to film both angles. I realized also that moving the camera during instruction, zooming in and out or simply moving the camera from one place in the classroom to another created a fragmented picture of the segments of instruction I was trying to record.

**Interviews.** Both formal and informal interviews with Norah and her students were conducted and audio-recorded during the data collection phase. In terms of formal interviews, I conducted an in-depth, open-ended interview with Norah at the beginning of the year, followed by a more semi-structured interview at end of the school year. I sensed that a more exploratory interview at the start of the project would create an opportunity for Norah to share what was most important to her as it related to my overarching research questions and the topics of literacy teaching and learning and the Mondo curriculum. It functioned as a sort of “get to know you” interview then, as data collection progressed and interim analysis was underway, I generated interview questions that “further clarif[ied] the central domains and factors in the study”
(LeCompte and Schensul, 1995b, p. 150). For instance, I asked Norah to explain why certain routines were followed in her classroom, for example, why texts were always projected onto a Promethean Board instead of provided, in hardcopy, to the children. I was able to reference specific pedagogical choices I saw Norah making and gain further insight into how and why her choices were made.

Individual, semi-structured interviews with the students provided opportunities to ask questions about their experiences with literacy in school, their relationships with literacy and learning, and their thoughts about what it means to be literate. I interviewed each of the students who consented to participation in my study once during the middle of the school year.

I also interviewed Emma, the district literacy coach, at the end of the year. She was eager to participate frequently offering to share district materials and participate in an interview. We sat down together at the end of the school year, so I was able to ask for her perspective on some of the practices I had, by that time in data collection, observed as normative and gain further insight into the district’s perspective on literacy instruction in the schools.

**Curriculum & instruction artifacts.** The Mondo program was a key data source for my study. However, as the influence of the test became clearer throughout data collection and interim analysis, I also collected artifact data related to literacy curriculum and instruction in the school and district, in general. For example, the team planning meetings were rich sites for data collection I had not anticipated in the design of my study. I collected the completed school-provided planning templates from these weekly meetings and district-provided documents such as radar graphs that indicated the frequency of the types of questions that would be assessed on the state standardized test and were often referenced during meetings. The meetings were also audio-recorded and later content-logged then transcribed during the analysis phase.
Student artifacts. In addition to comprehensive instructional materials, I also collected the students’ reading response journals where they documented their written responses to texts. Norah shared her grade book, the students’ scores on district benchmark assessment and the state standardize assessment, as well. Ultimately, my goal was to collect data from students, teachers, classroom, school and district in order to connect the dots during the analysis stage that followed.

Data Analysis

While I have organized this chapter into separate sections distinguishing between phases of data collection and data analysis, I wish to be clear that I do not view these two phases as separate, unrelated steps in either design or execution of my research study. Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) remind us that “research design is crucial to ethnography, but it is a reflexive process that operates throughout every state of a project” (p. 21). My preliminary analysis inevitably began while I was in the field collecting data. I developed hunches about what I was seeing during my classroom visits and attendance in the planning meetings. Some of these hunches developed into the claims I make in this dissertation while some moved to the periphery as other seeds of findings demanded my attention. My goal is to trace this process that was not perfectly linear, but the trajectory follows a logic and points to how the twists and turns were informed by the analytic processes that preceded them and shaped the process that followed.

Analytic memos. I started formal analysis by writing analytic memos. In a sense the Observer Comments I included in my field notes throughout my study were a form of analysis. I jotted down notes as I started to see the patterns coming together. For example, the following excerpt from a fieldnote I wrote in November illustrates the presence of the test that stole my focus away from just the Mondo program early in data collection.

I arrive as the class is finishing up math. [Norah] is returning a math assessment to the students. The grades on top of each test paper are not numerical, percentage or letter
grade on the A-F scale. The grades are [SSA] terms: P, PP, U. There is some concern as to how the kids performed, generally. Norah says, ‘If you did not get proficient then you have work to do…If you got a U then there should be something in your brain that says, wow, I need to change something….to pay attention…’ (OC: There is no question that test scores are of paramount importance. It seems to influence the day-to-day interactions.) (FN 2011.11-3 Reading)

A week later, I included an Observer Comment about the focus on test scores in the fieldnotes I was writing during an instructional planning meeting. I was noticing the influence not only in the classroom, but also in the planning of classroom activity and included emerging questions and ideas in the fieldnotes. An excerpt is below:

At the beginning of the meeting, the team is reviewing students’ writing samples. [Blake], who has recently returned from Paternity Leave, asks about what constitutes “proficient” explaining that he wants to be sure he is being fair and consistent when he assesses his class the next week. In response, [Norah] shares [Annie]’s response ([Annie] got a partially proficient). [Norah], after reading [Annie]’s response aloud, then explained what she wanted [Annie] to include that she did not include. (OC: I am wondering, if each planning meeting is data driven and so closely aligned with the terms of the SSA, why there is no rubric or more systematic approach for assessing the kids’ writing?)

These emerging ideas I was jotting down in the form of OC’s started to ‘nag’ at me. In part because I was focusing on the Mondo program, but distracted by the other patterns of discourse, practices and routines that were clear and commanding my attention. But, also because there is a sense of urgency that is felt when these budding ideas arise during data collection. I worried I would not be able to ‘hold’ all of my ideas while also implementing the research study I designed to examine the mediating role of the Mondo program. I wanted to follow the threads I saw started, but worried, also, about going astray, off-topic, away from my ‘research agenda’. In the moment I was not sure how what I was seeing and what I was ‘trying to see’ were fitting together, so I wanted to organize my thoughts systemically in order to capture emerging ideas, themes and patterns across my data sources. Importantly, generating memos also enabled me to tease out these buds of ideas and write-through developing thoughts and
connections. On the topic of memoing, Miles & Huberman (1994) write, “They don’t just report data; they tie together pieces of data into a recognizable clutter” (p. 72). Their claim resonates with me because the process of collecting a corpus of data can be overwhelming, but the processing of memoing helped me to organize my conjectures not into a polished set of claims, but certainly into a “recognizable clutter”.

**Generating Codes** The process of memoing over the course of data collection and during the earliest months of analysis ultimately contributed, in a cyclical fashion, to the process of coding. I included Observer Comments in my fieldnotes and wrote sometimes brief, sometimes expansive memos about the patterns I saw forming in my data. Some of these patterns gave way to inductive codes while some helped me to refine the deductive codes I was drawing from theoretical framework and the literature on literacy teaching and learning. I generated an initial list of low-inference top-down codes defined by LeCompte and Schensul (1999) as “names or symbols used to stand for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena that the researcher has noticed in his or her data set” (p. 55). Inductively, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify patterns of similarity and difference among the data and data sources, triangulating between interview, audio-video, field note, and artifact data. These two categories of codes were created over time through trial and error and fits and starts. But, the process did require engagement with a cyclical process of reflection and analysis.

Eventually, I organized my data into three big ideas that were important to my study:

**Idea #1: Examination of teacher planning meetings**
- What was being talking about?
- What do the teachers spend the most time talking about?
- Does what the teachers talk about and how much time they spend talking about it change if/when the literacy coach is present?
- Is there distributed expertise? Who talks? Who makes decisions? Does this matter?
Idea #2: Proficiency

- How is proficiency talked about in meetings?
- When does talk about kids and talk about proficiency intersect? How? When the test is talked about? When standards are talked about?
- Are the tests and the standards conflated/treated as synonymous?
- What does proficiency mean to Norah? To the literacy coach?
- How do students achieve proficiency?
- How does the teachers’ expressed conceptualization of proficiency align or not with what they actually do to achieve this definition of proficiency?
- How does the goal of proficiency in reading compare/contrast with sociocultural perspectives of literacy?

Idea #3: Language Structures

- Socializing children to and through language (in this regard, the equity issues becomes very salient/visible)
- I also think about the language structures as tools for procedural display
- Norah’s realization at the end of the year that the children cannot write responses to text on their own without the language structure is powerful

These big ideas enabled me to step back from the data and begin to see connections across data sources. For example, coding for “proficiency” would enable me to see patterns that existed from the planning meeting to classroom instruction to the student assessment the students wrote in their response journals. Applying codes drawn from a sociocultural perspective of literacy would also allow me to see just what “proficiency” meant across those planning, teaching, and assessing data, as well. I began to find ways to infuse the categories I expected—for example, compliance with Mondo—and the categories I had not expected such as the language structures.

The organizational scheme that I created to sort data, identify themes and make some conjectures about what was happening in Norah’s classroom is just one example of one possibility. Another researcher in Norah’s classroom might have chosen to focus her analytic attentions to other aspects of the data. My goal here is to share how I found and constructed conceptual categories in the data and how I the process of memoing progressed from Observer Comments to formal, lengthy analytic memos, how those memos helped me to see big themes.
and ideas that eventually helped me construct categories of codes that were both inductive and deductive.

In the end I developed five main codes: 1.) text choice, 2.) curriculum compliance 3.) teaching & learning, 4.) accountability, and 5.) Four Resources Model of Reading all of which included one and two layers of subcodes. For example, curriculum compliance may have been coded as a.) following or b.) not following the curriculum. Then, not following the curriculum was coded as for 2b.1) Using outside text or 2b.2) Using Mondo text with different instructional plan. I coded by hand, using color coding to identify patterns and overlap. In fact, in the end, as I got further and further into the data I found it most helpful to spread hard paper copies of all the data sources out on any surface I could find—typically the floor—to see the relationships. I could move easily between field notes, planning meeting agenda and student work to follow threads and see the web, tangled as it may have been. Trying to see the relationships on my 13 inch laptop monitor was a real obstacle. I lost sight of the forest through the trees and for the last few months of analysis relied on paper, highlighters, and room to spread out.

**Audio data analysis.** Throughout processes of memoing and code development I was also content logging and transcribing audio data. I started by transcribing the two interviews with Norah. Then, because Norah talked in her interviews about the value of the data-driven nature of the planning meetings I went straight to content logging the audio-recordings of the planning meetings. I started by logging two-minute segments, but ultimately ended up transcribing most of the meetings because how the teachers talked, specifically, about proficiency, literacy, and learning was crucial for my study. I used the tools afforded by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to keep notes about my interviews with Norah and Emma and the conversations between teachers and the literacy coach in the meetings. The logs and transcripts were coded as data, but
the questions generated vis-à-vis CDA allowed me to ‘flag’ bounded sections of the transcripts that I also analyzed using the tools that discourse analysis offers.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

As I explained in my theoretical framing, my goal was to understand the complex role discourse—and the power relations part and parcel of discourse practices—played in the relationship between teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom. Ultimately, an analysis of discourse also allowed me to see how teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom were linked to the school and district contexts all of which were influenced, profoundly, by the state test. Questions associated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were highly useful on my path to understanding how the school and district climate were shaping Norah’s fidelity to Mondo and her classroom instruction with or without the Mondo texts. Digging beneath the surface of language to examine, more closely, how language operated in planning meetings, in particular, was invaluable to my analysis.

As Fairclough (2000) outlines, the three tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis can be identified as 1) discourse shaped and constrained by social structure 2) discourse shaped and constrained by culture, and 3) the words and language we use to interpret and construct meaning. Drawing on a hybrid of Fairclough (1989), Luke (2004-5), Dutro (2010, 2012) and Gee (1999), I generated the following list of questions I posed to the data in an attempt to make sense of the relationship between those layered tenets and understand the implications for students and teachers positioned by the mandated program and tools that supported the program’s use:

- What are the value-laden words and phrases teachers used to talk about teaching and learning? What are the value-laden words and phrases teachers used to talk about children?
• How are value-laden words introduced into teachers’ talk about teaching and learning?

About children?

• Are there words that teachers contest? Are there words teachers appropriate?

• Are there implicit authority claims and implicit power relations?

• How are pronouns (e.g. me, we, them) used? What identifications, affiliations or separations do these create?

• What ideologically significant meaning relations are there between words?

• Are there ways in which the text seeks to control the language of others?

Throughout data collection and analysis I immersed myself in the data, engaged in cycles of thinking-analyzing-reflecting, and worked to develop the inductive and deductive codes that supported me to make connections about teaching and learning across a corpus of data that, often times, felt unruly. Furthermore, the tools afforded by CDA and my methodological framework enabled me to link those connections to structures of power that ultimately helped me make sense of how the Mondo reading program was one tool within a system of activity that privileged test scores, as the following analysis chapters discuss.
**PROLOGUE to ANALYSIS**

Over the course of the six months I observed teaching and learning in her classroom, Norah planned for and taught fifteen texts during whole group reading instruction. Of those fifteen books, seven were selected from the Mondo *Bookshop* program and eight were texts that Norah and her team teachers, Blake and Jamie, selected (see Table 1.1). In other words, about half the time, the fifth grade teachers chose books from their own libraries in what can be interpreted as a display of resistance to the mandated program.

I present these specific data about text choice early to clearly illustrate three initial findings that are fundamental to the in-depth analysis that unfolds in the proceeding chapters. First, Norah followed the curriculum about half the time. Second, following (or not) the curriculum was negotiated around the text. Third, there was a rhythm to the text choices; a back and forth where every one or two texts alternated between Mondo texts and what Norah refers to throughout the school year as “supplemental texts”, an interesting name since they supplemented the curriculum by way of *replacing* texts.

So, why did Norah do this? While it is clear from these initial findings that she indeed negotiated her use of the mandated curriculum, it is crucial to understand the values, views, and motivations that underlie who Norah is as a teacher in order to understand what informed Norah’s decision making around this ongoing negotiation. And how did she do this? Opting to use the texts sanctioned by the district-mandated program only half the time represents surface-level resistance. However, key to this examination is to dig beneath the surface in order to expose the features of teaching practices enacted with and without Mondo texts and, importantly, the implications of these features of instruction for the teaching and learning of reading in Norah’s classroom.
### Table 1.1

*Shared Texts for Whole Group Reading Instruction in Focal Classroom*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mondo Bookshop</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Chris Van Allsburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>In and Around the Pacific Rim</em></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><em>Charles</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Shirley Jackson</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>The Legend of Nandi, the Spider Woman</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Carina Pasquesi</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td><em>Won’t Take No for an Answer!</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The Story of Aviation Pioneer</em></td>
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<td><em>Bessie Coleman</em></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td><em>Just a Dream</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>by Chris Van Allsburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Women of the American Revolution: “Sybil Ludington”</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><em>The Space Program</em></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td><em>White Wave, Chinese Folktale</em></td>
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<td>As told by Diane Wollstein</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><em>The Hitchhiker</em></td>
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<td>by Roald Dahl</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><em>Water Wonders of the World</em></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td><em>America’s Mountains</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Bad Day at Riverbend</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>by Chris Van Allsburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>Rescue Missions: “High Rise Rescue”</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>Under the Rug</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>By Jon Scieszka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>7 Texts</td>
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<td>8 Texts</td>
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CHAPTER 4
Norah Under Pressure: Mondo-Resistant, Test-Prep Complicit

One fall afternoon, Norah and I sat together at a kidney-shaped table in her bright, cheerful and now quiet classroom. Her students were all gone for the day and, despite the late hour and extension to her already busy day of teaching, Norah was relaxed and smiling as she shared how her own experiences as a struggling reader in elementary school shaped her practice as a classroom teacher. As we sat together at the table, she recounted with candor a story about the time her fourth grade teacher—a teacher she identified as one of her favorites—planned a special activity for the high-level reading group related to the children’s classic, Tuck Everlasting. Norah recalled the memory, explaining that her teacher brought spring water into class that only the high-level students reading Tuck Everlasting were allowed to drink. She confided, “I was, like, crushed, ‘cause they were all gonna live forever and we were not.” She laughed as she told the story, but her point was clear: the experience, she told me, scarred her, recalling, “It was like the high group…that got to read the cool books…and do the fun activities!” The evidence presented in this and the following chapters reveals that, throughout the school year, Norah consistently looked outside the district-mandated Mondo Bookshop program in an effort to make those “cool books” available to the students—all the students—in her classroom.

When a teacher departs from the program mandated by her school and district for the purpose of providing the students with access to “cool books” evidence of competing conceptualizations of literacy becomes visible. The analysis presented in chapters 5 through 7 will explicate how Norah’s decisions about ‘following’ or ‘not following’ Mondo for reading instruction actually mattered in her classroom. There, I highlight the specific practices Norah enacted in her negotiation of the curriculum to illustrate that she indeed tried to push on the
constraints of the program and exercise agency in her choices of texts, in particular. However, classroom instruction, even as she resisted, deferred to a narrow, but powerful notion of proficiency that in spite of Norah’s efforts delimited possibilities for her students’ literacy learning and restricted opportunities for the students to engage with meaningful acts of reading. First, however, in order to deeply understand the ways Norah was and was not resistant and compliant, it is key to uncover what is less visible—the beliefs about literacy and learning underpinning her teaching practice.

Norah’s assumptions about literacy and learning developed over time: from her own elementary school years to her fifth year as a classroom teacher at Lazarus Elementary School nearly two decades later. Her assumptions about literacy and learning developed across settings: from her grade level classrooms to university-based teacher education classrooms to in-service professional development trainings and planning meetings. Because her beliefs and assumptions developed over time and across spaces—as all of our beliefs and assumptions do—they were multi-dimensional, grounded in a long history of lived experiences that shaped and guided the teaching practice I observed during the year I collected data in Norah’s classroom.

In this chapter I offer a portrayal of Norah—a teacher who simultaneously resisted and complied with the district-mandated program—that is necessarily complex in order to identify points of tension and fissure between her ideas and expectations about literacy teaching and learning and those presented, whether implicitly or explicitly, in the Mondo Bookshop reading program selected, purchased and required by district officials. Three main sections comprise this chapter. First, I illuminate Norah’s beliefs about teaching and teachers. Then I follow this thread from beliefs about teaching to an analysis of what Norah believed enabled her to enact her beliefs about teaching. At this point of the analysis a tension—a discrepancy between what
Norah believed and what she enacted as good teaching—becomes visible. In the third and final section I confront this site of tension to better understand why Norah’s ideas about good teaching seemed out of sync with the supports she identified as most useful to practice the kind of teaching that aligned with her beliefs. There, the anxieties connected to the intervening role of the State Standardized Assessment (SSA) come into focus as Norah’s language across interviews reveals that pressure surrounding the SSA took several forms that layered and interwove in sometimes seemingly contradictory ways.

**Good Teachers:**
**Norah’s Beliefs about Teachers & Teaching**

Interviews with Norah serve as bookends to the data collected over the course of the school year. To gain insight into the beliefs and assumptions about teaching informing Norah’s negotiation of the curriculum, I began by looking at these interview data and synthesizing 1) Norah’s responses to questions about her favorite teachers; 2) the language she used to describe herself as a teacher; 3) the qualities and characteristics of good teachers she identified; 4) how she discussed her goals for her students; and 5) how her responses might have changed from the beginning to the end of the school year. As I read through the interview transcripts numerous times, I coded and organized her responses into the table below (Table 4.1) looking for patterns and relationships among her responses.

There are important findings evident in Table 4.1 that contribute to an understanding of Norah’s beliefs about teaching and teachers. First, her perspective on learning aligned, even if unwittingly, with a sociocultural perspective. Second, her characterization of a good teacher was complex in that she offered a picture of one composite teacher who embodies both/and qualities of ‘hard teachers’ and ‘fun teachers’.
Table 4.1
Norah’s Responses About Characteristics of and Goals for Good Teachers and Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe Your Favorite Teacher</th>
<th>Describe Yourself as a Teacher</th>
<th>Goals for Your Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Identify the Qualities of a Good Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taught me organization skills</td>
<td>• I want [the students] to leave my classroom with skills they can take with them throughout life…Did you learn how to be a learner? And problem solve.</td>
<td>• To get [the students] to learn… have the skills to take them into the future… For them to be successful in the rest of their school and in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taught me skills I took through schooling</td>
<td>• Fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pushed me</td>
<td>• Respectful to students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard</td>
<td>• Adjusts for kids’ abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scary</td>
<td>• High Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Hold students accountable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive experiences</td>
<td>• Passion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Less academic, more fun</td>
<td>• Enjoyment for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sociocultural View of Learning

A belief that was evident across Norah’s responses to each of the questions about good teaching is that good teachers support their students to be learners—not simply to learn decontextualized skills and content, but to learn the skills that set them up for success in school and in life. This is what Norah’s favorite teacher, her fifth grade teacher, did for her as Norah explains in the full excerpt below. I have added the underline to the transcript to highlight talk that maps, explicitly, to the idea that good teachers provide students with the skills they need across contexts.

Andrea: So, what did you love about the fifth grade teacher?
Norah: I feel like fifth grade was the first year where I was, like, pushed and like she taught me organization skills and she taught me things that I carried through my schooling.

Andrea: mhm

Norah: Like she was really, like she was the hard teacher. Like everybody was scared to get her. And when I found out I was in her class I was like ‘aw man’. But, then she ended up being really influential, so-

The valuable experiences provided by Norah’s fifth grade teacher—opportunities to learn “things that [she] carried through schooling”—are experiences it was clear she was striving to replicate as a teacher. She discussed this expressed goal for her students in the following excerpt.

Andrea: So, how would you describe yourself as a teacher?

Norah: Um, I would like to think of myself as fair. Like I try to be fair and respectful to my students. Um, and I hope like I try really hard to have high expectations for them. Um, holding them accountable for their own learning. Um [pause] wow this is hard.

Andrea: I know it is hard.

Norah: Yeah, I try to hold them to high expectations and hold them accountable. And give them—I feel like I want them to leave my classroom with skills they can take with them throughout life. Like not just did you learn fractions, but did you learn how to be a learner? And did you learn how to problem solve.

The central assumption embedded in Norah’s talk—both in reflection on her own experiences as a student and in conversation about the goals she set for her students and for
herself as a teacher—is that school is successful when it promotes learning that shares connections and relevance with authentic contexts. Norah’s fifth grade teacher was memorable to her, a favorite, because she created opportunities for Norah to learn the skills she needed to be successful as a student. Many years later, Norah strived to support her own students to be intellectually curious and develop the problem-solving skills she believed they would need in and out of school. This perspective—Norah’s perspective—aligns with a social practice view of literacy and learning that conceptualizes learning and development as situated in and constituted by the social and cultural contexts of their actions. (Scriber & Cole, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978).

With this, I return to the earlier point about Mondo and non-Mondo text choices. As stated, Norah taught 15 books during data collection. Of those 15 books, only seven were the texts provided by the Mondo curriculum, while the other eight texts were selected by Norah and the other teachers on her grade level team. While subsequent chapters offer an extended analysis of Norah’s negotiation of the curriculum around text choice, here, I revisit these numbers to illuminate a tension between her theory of literacy learning and the theory of learning embodied in the Mondo program. Norah perceived an incompatibility between her goals and the tools provided by the Mondo program. To this point, Norah described her use of “supplemental texts” as “necessary”. It was “necessary” to use texts from outside the Mondo program in order to accomplish her goals as a teacher, as the excerpt below illustrates.

Andrea: Do you feel, generally, like [Mondo] materials are useful?
Norah: Uh I think that they’re useful. Umm, to a certain extent. I think they’re a good like base to- like a good foundation, I guess.
Andrea: mhm
Norah: And then pulling in other things to supplement it and to enrich it is
necessary.

Andrea. Mm

Norah: For an effective literacy curriculum, or literacy block, whatever

So if, indeed, Norah’s primary goals were to be fair and respectful, have high expectations and hold students accountable for meeting those high expectations so they were able to leave her classroom as learners and problem solvers, then a “necessary” departure from the curriculum suggests that following the curriculum put Norah and her students at risk for falling short of this goal. In her talk, she recognized the program as useful, but also put a proverbial cap on its utility—it was useful “to a certain extent.” The curriculum-included texts provided a “foundation” (and, thus, she imbued them with importance), but were not, to draw on her metaphor, the building she strived to construct. After a point, it was only by abandoning some of the texts presented in the Mondo curriculum and including, instead, the supplemental materials that “enriched” it, that Norah saw it possible to enact the sociocultural theory of literacy and learning she held.

**Complexity of Teacher Identity**

Norah’s descriptions of her negotiations with the literacy curriculum connected with her examples of good teachers. In those descriptions of good teachers, she drew on the seemingly oppositional qualities of both of her favorite teachers. She named student accountability and high expectations as important which mapped back to Norah’s fifth grade teacher—the same teacher who supported Norah to develop the skills she leveraged to be successful in school. This teacher was one of two favorites Norah identified. This was also the teacher Norah described as “hard”, but a teacher who “pushed” her. Returning to the same interview excerpt provided above, this time I underline the qualities Norah perceived this particular teacher possessed.
Andrea: So, what did you love about the fifth grade teacher?

Norah: I feel like fifth grade was the first year where I was, like, pushed and like she taught me organization skills and she taught me things that I carried through my schooling.

Andrea: mhm

Norah: Like she was really, like she was the hard teacher. Like everybody was scared to get her. And when I found out I was in her class I was like ‘aw man’. But, then she ended up being really influential, so-

In addition to “accountability” and “high expectations”, Norah also named “passion” and “enjoyment” as aspects of the learning process that she believed good teachers fostered explaining a goal for her students was to “give them the passion and the enjoyment out of learning but still holding them to high expectations”. These aspects map back to the qualities of Norah’s other favorite teacher—her fourth grade teacher—who, Norah explained, was a favorite because she had good experiences in her classroom that were “less academic” and more “fun”, as presented in the excerpt below.

Andrea: How about that 4th grade teacher?

Norah: From her, I feel like it was more just positive experiences in her class

Andrea: Mhm

Norah: Less academic. Like, I didn’t, that’s not really why I liked her.

Andrea: Mhm

Norah: It was just like a fun year

In her descriptions of herself as a teacher, Norah did not separate qualities of fun versus academic as she dichotomously separated them in her own memories of her two favorite teachers
in elementary school. She wanted to give her students “the passion and the enjoyment out of learning but still holding them to high expectations”. She drew this description of herself from the qualities she valued in her fourth grade teacher and the qualities she valued in her fifth grade teacher, identifying these characteristics as two dimensions of one good teacher thus challenging the notion that a teacher must be either/or and emphasizing that they can be—and are—both/and. Indeed, her descriptions of her supplements to the curriculum suggest a connection to the sense of “hard” and “passion”, “academic” and “fun” that she was negotiating in her vision of good literacy teaching. The “foundation” of the curriculum needed to be buttressed with “cool” books.

**Enacting Beliefs:**

**How Ideas About Teaching Are and Are Not Made Possible**

As I started to uncover what was important to Norah as a teacher and the qualities she believed teachers needed to possess in order to effectively meet her expressed goals I further mined the interview data in an effort to make sense of how Norah felt she was or was not able to enact those beliefs. In what practices did she engage to be a teacher who was both rigorous and fun, adjusted to children’s perceived abilities while maintaining high expectations of everyone, was fair and respectful, but held students accountable? I wanted to peel back another layer so that I might begin to make visible the sensibility guiding Norah’s process of negotiating the curriculum.

To peel back this layer, I returned to questions I asked Norah about what made it possible for her to enact the practices most closely associated with her beliefs, and what, from Norah’s point of view, made it difficult for her to do this. When I asked Norah about what makes it hard to be the kind of teacher she wanted to be she told me “time”. Time constraints prohibited the kind of community- and character-building activities Norah saw as integral to a well-managed classroom where kids “get a lot more learning done”. When I asked her about what makes it
possible to be the kind of teacher she wanted to be she told me team planning and professional development. Norah extended her explanation of this by referencing “data”, which she saw as indicative of holding teachers to higher-expectations. Her complete response is included in the following excerpt:

Andrea: Are there things that, um, that that you feel like help you to be that teacher that holds high expectations? And what kinds of things are sort of in place that you feel like support you in that?

Norah: Um, well I think um like team planning and the professional development that we have in the building. Even though it’s time consuming and sometimes it’s hard to meet with the teams I think that the team planning definitely helps hold you personally to a higher expectation ‘cause you’re looking at data and you’re talking about trends, so I think that for sure helps.

This excerpt represents a focus that was prominent throughout the school year: “looking at data”. Norah believed that the team planning meetings and the professional development trainings supported her to be the teacher she envisioned. She acknowledged that time for the planning meetings was a constraint, but finding time for the team planning meetings was worthwhile because those meetings functioned to hold the teachers to a “higher expectation”, which Norah saw as good, as important. The question is: Higher than what? The supposition is that “looking at data and…talking about trends…for sure helps” to hold teachers to a “higher expectation”, but to what are those expectations superlative?

Further, “time” was the one factor that Norah named when asked what made it difficult to be the teacher she wanted to be. She did not have time for the community- and character-
building activities that Norah believed would contribute to her classroom in positive ways and support her students to “get a lot more learning done”. Those features of her elementary classroom went unrealized, un-nurtured. Time *was* made, however, to “look at data” in collaborative planning meetings each week.

Norah, like so many teachers, was squeezed for time. Thus, she was forced to make concessions. The routines that she believed were integral to a classroom where “more learning” was possible had to be excluded even though she saw these routines as connected to her vision of successful teaching. Time was found for “looking at student data” however, because this, this ‘data-driven’ practice, held the teachers to high expectations. Norah’s values came into clearer focus. Less clear, however, was what level of expectations was being compared with the level of expectations exercised in settings where teachers “looked at data”.

**Data as a Valuable Support**

While I introduce Norah’s perceptions of the value of ‘data-driven’ planning and professional development in this chapter, in the following chapter I explicate key findings related to what ‘data-driven’ really meant for the teachers and what ‘data-driven’ planning actually looked like in practice. Here, I will illustrate 1.) The centrality of ‘data’ in Norah’s talk about enacting good teaching and 2.) The dichotomy Norah established between ‘data-driven’, real life teaching and creative, “grandiose” teaching.

**Professional Development: “Honestly, I feel like I’ve learned more from the district’s professional developments than I did from school.”** Norah cited professional development as useful when directly asked about the kinds of supports that enabled her to be the teacher she wanted to be. Professional development *also* came up at other points in our interview. For example, when I asked Norah to talk about her teacher preparation she named
district professional development as the most useful component of all of her teacher training while identifying her university-based pre-service teacher preparation as decidedly less useful. I wanted to understand more about the supports that Norah saw as useful and/or not useful, but I also wondered how perceived utility did or did not align with her assumptions about teaching and learning. In addition, since Norah pointed to district professional development as a positive support and one that she valued more than her teacher education, I wanted to know what, exactly, the professional development supported her to do. Finally, would deeper understandings of the function of professional development at Lazarus Elementary lend clarity or complexity to the depiction of Norah as a teacher?

Across data sources, Norah talked about the district’s professional development as useful, which contrasted with her talk about the teacher education program she completed as an undergraduate at a major research university. After she completed teacher education and licensure and was practicing as a classroom teacher, Norah returned to the same university for her Master’s degree. She described her graduate level education as more relevant than her undergraduate teacher education, but still not as valuable as the district’s professional development trainings. Her ranking of the utility of various pre- and in-service training is depicted below in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1
Norah’s Ranking of Teacher Training

- University Undergraduate Teacher Education
- University Master’s Degree Program
- District Professional Development
In order to understand more about how Norah’s perceptions of the value of preparation and support she received preceding and during her five years as a teacher did or did not fit with her beliefs about teaching and learning, I began by trying to disentangle what features, specifically, Norah identified as useful or problematic about her teacher education, her Master’s degree program, and her district professional development. This analysis yielded three separate, but inter-related, conclusions. First, Norah identified teacher education as least valuable because it was disconnected from what she referred to as “real-life teaching”. Extending this finding, I drew a second conclusion that the conceptualization of literacy underpinning Norah’s university-teacher education—which she referred to as “grandiose”—was in conflict with the conceptualization of literacy underpinning her idea of “real-life teaching”. The suggestion here is that “grandiose” ideas about literacy and “real life” classrooms are in tension with each other. Third, because district professional development was “data-driven”, it seemed that Norah saw data as well-aligned with real-life teaching in a way that “grandiose” ideas about literacy were not. Thus, from Norah’s point of view, “grandiose” ideas about literacy were incompatible with ‘data-driven’ teaching. In her talk, Norah portrayed the features of and theories underpinning teacher education and district professional development as oppositional.

Of interest, while Norah did consistently talk about teacher education and district professional development in a binary relationship, there were features of the teacher education side of her dichotomy that she identified as valuable, specifically, creativity as the following excerpt illustrates.

It’s nice to have, like, the creativity part of it ‘cause I feel like if I didn’t get any of that in school then I wouldn’t have any of it cause we don’t really have that in the district either, so—
Norah seemed to interpret creative teaching, part of what she defined as a “grandiose” idea about literacy, as being in tension with the ‘data-driven’ instructional practices, such as small group instruction, of “real life” classrooms. Although she believed creativity was important and acknowledged this useful contribution of her teacher education, the hierarchy of what was really valued came into clearer focus. Norah consistently and repeatedly named district professional development as the most useful support for enabling her to be the teacher she strived to be. She consistently used language that placed high value on ‘data-driven’ support that helped her navigate “real-life” teaching. Big ideas about literacy and creative instruction held less value. (See Figure 4.2). This was consistent with the relegated value of community- and character-building activities in her classroom, for which there was not time.

Figure 4.2
Norah’s Perceptions of the Value of Teacher Education versus Professional Development

An analysis of the supports Norah identified as useful and not useful uncovered an interesting, yet problematic tension: Norah’s reasons for elevating the status of district professional development conflicted with her explicit goals for teaching. As I highlighted earlier,
Norah explained, “I want [the students] to leave my classroom with skills they can take with them throughout life. Like not just did you learn fractions, but did you learn how to be a learner? And did you learn how to problem solve.” While this seems very clearly informed by a robust theory of learning, Norah denounced her teacher education program because, as she shared, “I feel like from [teacher ed] you have this grandiose idea about what literacy can be like in your classroom and then you get into a real life classroom and you’re like it’s not like that.” This tension is implicated in interpretations of the beliefs and assumptions informing Norah’s negotiation of the curriculum.

There is evidence to suggest Norah resisted Mondo by choosing texts of her own because she held a theory of teaching and learning that was aligned with a sociocultural perspective that was incompatible with a one-size fits all packaged reading program. This was, of course, a bit too one-dimensional and simplistic, however. Indeed, one of the goals of my analysis was to make sense of and understand more deeply what was happening at this point of complication.

**Professional Development, Planning Meetings & the Value of Data.** At Lazarus Elementary School, professional development served a different function than the team planning meetings. While the professional development—which, as stated, Norah believed was useful—was meant to provide additional training on aspects of classroom practice, the team planning meetings were time for grade-level teams of teachers to collaboratively plan for instruction. Despite their different functions, Norah often named both professional development and planning meetings together and, as the excerpt below (that was also provided above) highlights, names them as the two routine structures most useful for her.
Andrea: Are there things that, um, that you feel like help you to be that teacher that holds high expectations? And what kinds of things are sort of in place that you feel like support you in that?

Norah: Uuum, well I think, um, like team planning and the professional development that we have in the building. Even though it’s time consuming and sometimes it’s hard to meet with the teams I think that the team planning definitely helps hold you personally to a higher expectation ‘cause you’re looking at data and you’re talking about trends, so I think that for sure helps.

Because Norah named professional development as one of the most useful aspects of her sum total of pre- and in-service teacher training, I wanted to compare how she talked about her formal teacher education versus professional development. The comparison between teacher education and district professional development illuminated misalignment between Norah’s beliefs about good teaching and learning and the supports she perceived enabled her to embody those beliefs. While she wanted to promote a love of learning and foster her students’ abilities to problem-solve, Norah cited “looking at data” and “higher expectations” as the key features of supports that helped her be the teacher she hoped to be, subordinating creativity, community- and character-building to the ‘data-driven’ structures of “real-life” teaching.

In the interview excerpt above, Norah’s talk combined the planning meetings and professional development and combined them in a way that suggests they were equally useful supports that enabled Norah to be the teacher she envisioned. To better understand how she believed these support structures accomplished this, I wanted to know more about Norah’s perceptions about what helped her be the teacher she envisioned and what hindered her. Similar
to my comparison of her teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, for each support she named as most useful—the planning meetings and the professional development—I asked: 1) What was it? and 2) What did Norah indicate was useful about it? After several passes through the data, I also added a third question: 3) Who organized it?

I begin with the question of “Who organized it?” The ‘who’ seemed important because a pattern emerged in relation to many of Norah’s instructional practices: when asked about specific practices, for example, why she used certain texts or organized the physical space of her classroom in a particular way, Norah inevitably credited the practice to either a principal or a more senior teacher who influenced her. The influence of administrators and senior teachers was lasting across all aspects of her teaching. These people of influence were, in every instance, teachers, coaches and administrators, both current and former, at Lazarus Elementary School. Thus, I was curious about who was associated with the structures Norah deemed so useful to her and what this meant for 1) How Norah was socialized into the practices valued by her and her colleagues at Lazarus and 2.) How people in positions of power passed on practices that were taken up by novice teachers like Norah.

The findings presented in Table 4.2 corroborate the earlier suggestion that Norah valued supports that were ‘data-driven’. Data was a central feature of both professional development and planning meetings and a feature that Norah often cited when discussing the utility of these routines. I want to make clear that data can, of course, be highly useful and valuable. My goal is not to suggest that privileging data is a poor practice. My goal is to draw attention to the fact that Norah highly valued ‘data-driven’ practices and talked about ‘data-driven’ teaching and training as in tension with creative teaching grounded in “grandiose” ideas about literacy.
### Table 4.2

#### Establishment & Development of Professional Development & Planning Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Team Planning Meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…a lot of professional development around Mondo. And then it’s kind of changed as everybody’s gotten familiar with it and we’ve kind of had a little more flexibility with using supplemental texts…”</td>
<td>“…when I first started teaching our plannings were more like what are we gonna do on Monday. Let’s read. And figure out where, like it was more superficial planning and not pushing into that deeper level thinking and looking at data like we never brought data to our team plannings a few years ago so I think that data piece is huge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is it?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teacher leaders bring data to leadership meetings & generate ideas, they pilot the ideas in their classrooms then, if successful, implement them school-wide. | A ‘building philosophy’
- Started with principal
- Then experienced principal turn over
- “Now getting back to it”
- Connected to the change in literacy coach staffing resulting from budget cuts |
| **Who organizes it?** | |
| “…now we have professional development around how to use [Mondo] for us” | Data-driven |
| **Why is it useful?** | |

Furthermore, it also became evident that Norah’s beliefs about data were connected to the teacher leaders and administrators in her school. The normative practices Norah labeled as ‘data-driven’—teacher leaders using “data” to inform the focus of professional development trainings and teachers bringing data to weekly planning meetings—were both linked to former principals. So, what Norah saw as valuable was cohesive with what the school leadership presented as valuable.

What was not clear until further analysis was what Norah, the teacher leaders, and the administrators meant when they used this word “data.” Data provided such a powerful driving force for the routines and decisions valued at Lazarus, so, as I explicate in the next chapter,
understanding “data” in the context of Lazarus was crucial in this study. I argue that the notion of “data” presented in the school-sanctioned planning template and interpreted by the teachers created an illusion of ‘data-driven’ planning and reified deficit perspectives.

Norah wanted to teach her students to be learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers. She wanted to hold them accountable to high expectations, but also wanted to know her students and differentiate for their varied interests and abilities. She wanted to push her students, but elicit joy and foster a love of learning. So, how and why is it that a teacher with these expressed goals for her teaching practice identified two structures explicitly framed as ‘data-driven’, which she saw as oppositional to creativity and “grandiose” ideas as the most useful supports for enacting these goals? The answer may be that the leaders and people of influence at the school privileged ‘data-driven’ instruction and conceptualized ‘data-driven’ as incompatible with creativity or big ideas about literacy. However, I believe clues for a more nuanced interpretation also lied in a significant shift that occurred from the first interview in November to my final interview with Norah in April, just days before the school year ended. This shift was centered in how she talked about the state tests. The high-stakes of the SSA imposed and created pressures and anxieties that manifested in different ways throughout the school year.

The SSA: Data-driven Practices and What It Means to ‘Teach to the Test’

In November, my interview with Norah lasted 56 minutes. During those 56 minutes, the word proficient was never used. In April, our interview lasted 28 minutes. During those 28 minutes, the word proficient was used 35 times—29 times by Norah and six by me. A similar shift occurred from the first to last interview in regards to the SSA. In February—the mid-point between the start and end points of this documented shift—what I have termed a “key event” occurred. During this “key event” Norah appeared visibly upset as she used data to make
predictions about her students’ expected performance on the upcoming SSA, a task that was required by district administration.

**Starting Point: Do You Think About the SSA?**

As Norah talked about her goals for her students in our first interview, she made no mention of test preparation, proficiency scores, or Adequate Yearly Progress\(^\text{10}\). So, during that first interview, I asked her, explicitly, if she thought about the SSA in her teaching:

Andrea: Do you think about the SSA?

Norah: Yeah. I mean, it’s hard not to. I try not to ya know teach to the test. Like this is on SSA so we have to teach it or this isn’t on SSA we don’t have to teach it, but it’s hard because I mean SSA’s huge. I mean that’s just what it is.

While Norah stated in our first interview that she did think about the state tests, she hinted at feeling conflicted and legitimized her response adding, “it’s hard not to”. She then immediately followed that statement with what might be read as a disclaimer statement: “I try not to teach to the test”. But, she again legitimized her response by saying that while she tried not to allow the test to determine what she did and did not teach in her classroom, it was “hard because the SSA is huge”. Her statement suggests a tension—she did not want to teach to the test, but it was hard not to and cited the metaphorical size and weight of the state exam as the thing that mad it hard not to teach to the test.

Norah then immediately tempered the “huge” influence of the SSA by adding, “that’s just what it is” which suggests she felt justified to teach to the test because, after all, how could she not since her reality—“that’s just what it is”—was that SSA was paramount, “it’s ‘huge”. Her response revealed a tension, but also complacency or, perhaps, resignation.

\(^\text{10}\) The data collection year was the last year the state was required to follow NCLB’s AYP regulation. The state was granted a waiver effective the following year. They now use their own growth model.
Hoping to learn more about what Norah meant when she stated that SSA was “huge” and drawing on the current issues of teacher accountability measures, I asked Norah about how the state tests influenced her thinking not only about preparing the kids—which she addressed in her initial response when she spoke about “teaching to the test”—but also about her own felt sense of job security. Our exchange is below:

Andrea: So you don’t feel— it doesn’t seem this way I just am curious to hear you talk about it. Like, do you feel pressure because of the presence of SSA not even just in terms of like preparing the kids but for your own job, your school?

Norah: Um, I feel less of it for my job, personally.

Andrea: mhm

Norah: More for the school, grade level

Andrea: mhm

Norah: Uh, ‘cause we look at data based on the grade level and obviously when fifth grade goes down it makes you feel personally responsible {slight laugh} for that, but I don’t think like I don’t feel like oh my gosh I’m gonna lose my job if I don’t do good on SSA.

Andrea: Ok

Norah: So, yeah, I don’t feel pressure in that aspect but as far as school wide and district wide there’s pressure there

When I asked Norah if she felt pressure she responded by stating she felt less pressure for her “job, personally”. She did not respond by saying yes or no, rather immediately identified where the pressure was or was not felt. This suggests it was normative—standard—to feel the pressure of the state exam. And while Norah stated that the pressure she felt was not for her
“job, personally” rather more for the school and the grade level she then indicated that if the school and grade level were not successful, she felt “personally responsible”. She did not indicate that she felt her job was in jeopardy substantiating her earlier statement that she felt the pressure less for her “job, personally”. But, she indicated that that she felt “personally responsible” if the school or grade level did not perform well. To feel personally responsible for a school’s test performance is a heavy burden, even as that weight comes as no surprise since the SSA was, as Norah stated just moments before, “huge”.

Moreover, as Norah clarified that she did not feel her job hinged on test performance she stated, “I don’t feel like oh my gosh I’m gonna lose my job if I don’t do good on SSA”. Norah used the pronoun, ‘I’, stating, “…if I don’t don’t do good on SSA”. While she earlier stated that she did not feel the pressure for her job, she also clearly stated that she felt personally responsible to the school and grade. Norah seemed to have internalized a sense of responsibility for test scores when she used the pronoun “I” in reference to doing or not doing well on the SSA. This points to how powerful the influence of the state test was and who was positioned as ultimately responsible for carrying the burden on behalf of children and schools.

Given this powerful influence and the onus placed on teachers, it might be expected that Norah shared a list of goals for her students and a list of characteristics and qualities she tried to enact in order to support her students to achieve those goals; yet, in her day to day teaching life, she said she felt most supported by school structures that were ‘data-driven’ even if they shared little common ground with her goals. In response to the pressure to prepare students for success on the state test, Norah diminished some of what she valued, such as creativity and community-building, because while she stated she believed these features of classrooms supported students
to “get a lot more learning done” she also recognized that she felt pressure from the school and district to prepare children for tests.

**End Point: Reflecting on the Role of SSA**

While Norah’s talk about the SSA did shift from the first to the last interview, there was evidence *during* the school year that foreshadowed the change. Norah was a teacher who, in her first interview, suggested she thought about the SSA, tried not to teach to the test, admitted this was a challenge because the test was “huge” but, ultimately, did not feel pressure “for her job”. Her demeanor was casual and her talk matter of fact. But, during a team planning meeting in February just weeks before the SSA was scheduled to be administered, Norah’s behavior contradicted her earlier claim that she did not worry much. The following vignette from this meeting is the “key event” referenced in the beginning of this section.

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The morning of the team’s scheduled planning meeting, Norah sent me the e-mail message below explaining the teachers, in lieu of planning for instruction, would be making predictions for the SSA.

*Just wanted to give you a heads up that we have a workday on Friday so kids won’t be here. Also, during our planning time Thursday we are going to be looking at overall proficiency and making predictions for SSA results. You are more than welcome to come for it I just wanted to let you know that it will be a little different from our normal planning. Hope you had a good weekend!*

During the meeting, Norah’s fifth grade teaching teammate, Blake, explained the task to me. The teachers were asked to make predictions about how many of their students would score Proficient on the upcoming SSA. The school principal also made predictions for each grade
level. Then the district compared teachers’ and principals’ predictions all of which were also compared with the school improvement plan.

The initial segment of the prediction conversation is below.

Blake: What’s your total number, Jamie?

Jamie: Proficient?

Blake: Proficient.

Jamie: 9

Norah: [in a tone that suggests she was incredulous]: 9!? Norah, what’s yours?

Blake: Norah, what’s yours?

Norah: [confidently] 5.

Blake then asked Jamie and Norah for the total number of students in their classes and the three teachers sat quietly as he made a calculation. When his calculation was complete, Blake reported that, based on their projected numbers, the fifth grade team would not “make their numbers” and talked with Jamie and Norah about the percentage of students that needed to score Proficient in order to show growth.

The team predicted 21 out of 56 total students would score Proficient on the SSA, but they needed 28 students to score Proficient. The conversation then shifted to talking about “wild cards” and the students who may score well “if they are having a good day”. After this interlude about the “wild cards” Norah stated, “Ok, let’s bump mine up.” Blake told her she should stick with her original predictions, explaining the predictions should be accurate, but he also suggested adding the “wild cards” to their overall projected numbers.

At this point in the conversation, Norah appeared visibly nervous. She started calling out different numbers unable to settle on one prediction, her rate of speech quickened and she
nervously justified each of the numbers she predicted. Blake, in earnest, stated, “Norah, just give me a number.” After a long pause Norah changed her original prediction from five to seven. Blake responded, “Ok,” then after a pause told the team, “I mean that puts us at 50%”. Visibly nervous, again, Norah called out, “We could put Kim in there! Kim could be a wild card.” Jamie laughed. Norah was both laughing and visibly agitated. Blake explained the importance of accuracy, again, and told Norah that she did not need to inflate her numbers. Moments later, Norah and Blake had the following exchange:

Norah: This is stressful
Blake: It’s not stressful
Norah: It is.
Blake: No it’s not

As the teachers wrapped up their conversation, Norah commented that the team “needs a miracle” and while she did calm down before they dispersed from the meeting back into their classrooms she told us one last time, “That just made me very stressed.”

***

So, in our final interview—the interview where proficiency was referenced 35 times in 28 minutes—I ask Norah about the shift that occurred from our first interview to that day in February:

Andrea: In your previous interview…we talked about whether or not you felt pressure about the kids’ test scores.
Norah: OK
Andrea: I think my question might have been about job security or about this thing that’s happening now where teacher’s pay is attached to students’ test scores.
Norah: Right, right

Andrea: And so you had said at that time that you didn’t really feel pressure that it was what it was. But then in February that day that you guys were making the predictions

Norah: Yes

Andrea: Actually **making** the predictions

Norah: [laughs] I was so stressed

Andrea: made you nervous

Norah: That’s very true

Andrea: And I totally get that. So, I guess I just wanted to find out from you, first of all, what you thought about that actual exercise of making the predictions.

Norah: Yeah

Andrea: And if it was, like, useful. And where you think that anxiety comes from.

Norah: Well, I think, um, when, well I think first of all when you have to put, like you know your kids by that point and you like know what they can do in class and then having to predict what they’re gonna do on SSA I think that part is stressful because it’s I mean like we just talked about like are they prepa—I mean I think the fact is like are they gonna be prepared enough? Like have I given them the tools they need to get proficient? When I **know** that they should get proficient. Like I know that Gemma is possible, like she’s capable of getting proficient, but is she going to kinda thing. Um, I think that that’s part of the stress is like have I prepared them enough for it. And then I also
think it’s stressful to like make this prediction and then like what are they actually gonna do? Ya know, like, I don’t know.

The pressure Norah felt to prepare her students for the state exam was clear. As soon as I raised the example during our interview, Norah recalled the day and shared, “I was so stressed”. She attributed this level of stress to doubt: “Are they gonna be prepared enough?” Indeed, her use of questions throughout her response, and the nature of those questions, was imbued with uncertainty. However, the focus of the doubt shifted in her language. For instance, after describing herself as “stressed” about whether students would be prepared for the SSA, she immediately shifted focus from the students’ preparedness to her responsibility for preparing them asking, “Like have I given them the tools they need to get proficient?” She talked about one student, Gemma, by name. Gemma was a student Norah knew was capable, but whose performance on the test may have belied not only her abilities, but also the work Norah did in her classroom each day to prepare Gemma. There, she doubts the test. But, almost instantly she shifted doubt away from the test and back to herself stating, “part of the stress is like have I prepared them enough for it.” What is the “it” to which Norah referred? A test, but one that she did not believe accessed the students’ potential and their learning, rather determined if they did or did not meet a cut score.

Of importance, another source of pressure was revealed in this example. There was the pressure associated with the task of preparing students for success on the state test and the doubt surrounding whether or not the test could and would measure how well Norah prepared them. But, there was also pressure associated with whether or not she was confident enough with her preparation that she was able to predict which students would score proficient and which students would not. I asked Norah about this prediction exercise:
Andrea: What’s useful about even doing it? Like, why make predictions?

Norah: Well I think the district requires it.

Andrea: Yeah

Norah: Like, the principals have to turn in those numbers to the district.

Andrea: Right

Norah: And so, I don’t know why the district wants it because it’s not gonna change how they perform.

In the above excerpt, the value of the prediction exercise came into question. If the predictions were not going to impact children’s performance on the test then what was the purpose of making them? Surveillance? When I asked ‘why’ Norah responded that the district required it. It was a rule. But, this did not answer important questions about how these predictions, as “data” required by the district, were connected to teaching, learning and assessment. It did begin to answer, however, why the exercise evoked anxiety from a teacher who claimed to not consciously worry about the SSA.

Doubtfully, Unconsciously Teaching to a Test

“What I have in my brain as proficient will that really match up with how they perform on the test”? The notion of ‘teaching to the test’ carries with it a literal connotation—an image of classroom instruction that teaches children, point-by-point, the skills and content assessed on their state’s high stakes exam leaving out anything not covered on that test. Of course, ‘teaching to the test’ is, in fact, something more complicated than that because underlying and informing the test is an ideology about what counts as literacy and learning, who makes the rules that regulate teaching and learning in classrooms, and who is responsible for carrying out the rules and enacting ideas about what counts. In the following excerpt Norah
continues to discuss the exercise of making predictions about SSA proficiency. This excerpt reveals the complexity of ‘teaching to the test’ and the ways a teacher could and did teach to a test even when she thought she was not.

Norah: So, I don’t know. I think the district wants to see, kinda like the last question you asked like, “Is what we think is proficient actually what is proficient on SSA?” Like, is there a correlation between the two?

Andrea: Right

Norah: Because you don’t want to be giving all these proficient when really they’re not gonna be a proficient reader. Or vice versa. Like, I don’t wanna give these kids PP’s when really they’re proficient.

Andrea: Right. So, the classroom and the SSA have to match, basically?

Norah: According to the district, yeah.

Andrea: And that’s. Yeah, yeah, and that’s pretty stressful. Cause you’re not thinking about that probably everyday when you teach.

Norah: No. I mean, obviously, like when we plan we like want to, we know that they’re gonna need to do this on SSA, and so we wanna give them like similar experiences in the classroom, but it’s not like, when I teach them I’m not like you need to learn this because of SSA. It’s you need to learn this to be a good reader, ya know.

Andrea: Mhm, right.

Norah: And so yeah I think just like what I have in my brain as proficient will that really match up with how they perform on the test.
Norah felt responsible for preparing her students to score well on the SSA. In this excerpt she also confirmed the school district wanted to know if the experiences and assessments she employed in her classroom aligned with the SSA assessment experience. Her words revealed the tension between the SSA and her own conviction that she did not want her students to perceive what they were learning in her classroom as driven by the test even as her words also make clear that classroom teaching, learning and assessment were, indeed, shaped by the test. ‘Teaching to the test’ manifested literally in the way structures and routines were modeled after the testing experiences and in the constraint Norah felt from the “stress” associated with preparing proficient reading test takers.

**Conclusion**

The SSA was, as Norah stated, “huge”. So, while she tried not to teach to the test, she also felt personally responsible for preparing her students to perform well on this “huge” exam. She did her best to prepare them, constantly negotiating, as performed in her language, the pressure to “teach to the test” and her resistance to that idea. Then, just before the test, she was charged with making predictions not only about what the children would do but also what *she* did, since—as was evident in her talk—she felt responsible for their preparation. Norah made those predictions, not because she thought they could or would in any way change the students’ levels of preparation, but rather because the district told her she had to. Further, when asked why the district required those predictions, she hypothesized that the district wanted to know if what and how she taught and assessed the students in her classroom matched what and how the SSA would assess them. It is, undeniably, a permutation of ‘teaching to the test’.

The goal of Norah’s teaching was not to prepare her fifth grade students to take one test. Her goal was to support her students to *learn*. To learn meaningful skills, content, and practices
that would set them up for long-term success in school. She envisioned fifth graders who were self-aware of their own processes of learning and capable of problem-solving. And, ever so important, she saw this not in place of SSA-related skills and content, but in addition to them for example saying, “not just did you learn fractions, but did you learn how to be a learner? And did you learn how to problem solve”? In other words, her goals did not conflict with a goal to prepare proficient readers. They transcended them. They were more robust. Norah perceived that her school and district, however, emphasized a notion of ‘achievement’ for which the privileged measure was the SSA and that “data” was holding teachers accountable for producing numbers that represented success on these measures. The pressure this placed on Norah was powerful and, perhaps, so normative, so invisible she did not see the way her “stress”—a term she and I used openly in our conversations about the SSA—intervened with her own teaching goals.

When Norah talked about the supports that helped her realize her vision of teaching she talked about ‘data-driven’ Mondo professional development trainings and planning meetings. Given that the professional development was mapped directly to test preparation, a point that is made in later chapters, and, thus, was in concert with the district’s expectations for literacy teaching, Norah’s use of the word “support” can be interpreted to suggest that she viewed the professional development as helpful for being the teacher the district wanted her to be. Where there is evidence of Norah being the teacher she wanted to be was in her negotiation of the curriculum. Each time she chose a text off the shelves of her classroom or at the suggestion of her co-teachers she talked about these choices in relation to being a teacher who was striving to support her students to learn and to love literacy and learning. In the next chapter, I present a portrayal of the ‘data-driven’ planning meetings Norah believed were valuable as an illusion. While those meetings were spaces for Norah to be the teacher the district wanted her to be, the
‘data-driven’ planning enacted there relied on a problematic definition of “data” that was leveraged to monitor and position students and teachers more than support robust teaching and learning.
CHAPTER 5
Looking At & Learning From:
Procedural Display and the Myth of Data-Driven Instruction

Norah was a teacher who often abandoned the district-mandated Mondo Bookshop program in an effort to provide her fifth grade students with access to “cool books”, a move that made competing conceptualizations of literacy visible. The analysis presented in Chapter 4 looked at the why questions behind a teacher’s departure from a district’s mandated reading program. Asking why revealed incongruities and contradictions between Norah’s expressed beliefs about good teaching and the kinds of supports she believed enabled her to enact good teaching in her Alba School District classroom. I argue that the pressure to prepare students for success on the state exam was at the heart of those tensions—pressure that was so great Norah’s assumptions and beliefs were swallowed by the test-prep ideology that was pervasive throughout her school and district. What Norah valued and the district valued did not align; however, Norah defaulted to the district’s emphasis on SSA-prep out of an overwhelming sense of personal responsibility to her students, her grade level and her school; a conundrum all too common for teachers in the current climate of the testing regime.

In this chapter, I ask how, in order to understand what influenced Norah’s decision-making and how these influences shaped the teaching and learning of reading in her classroom. I begin with and focus centrally on the planning meetings since these meetings were not only rich sites of instructional decisions, but also because they represent the intersection of district, school, teachers and students as the teachers followed a school-provided template that prompted them to leverage “student data” to inform their teaching. In this chapter, I will illustrate the ways normative practices established during the planning meetings both contributed to, as well as represented, the space between resistance and compliance, a space rife with tension that Norah
navigated throughout the school year. The central argument of this chapter is that students and teachers were positioned in complex and concerning ways by the school-sanctioned planning template, which contributed to a script\(^\text{11}\) and functioned to create an *illusion* of data-driven planning and reified deficit perspectives. Furthermore, because each planning session followed the steps prescribed in the template, meetings when teachers planned for both Mondo and non-Mondo texts all reflected this same mirage—an appearance of rigorous data-driven decision-making—and were organized around an ambiguous conceptualization of proficiency. I also explore the implications of these findings.

Ultimately, as was made clear in chapter 4, Norah’s own ideas about and approaches to successful teaching and learning were tangled up with expectations for student performance on the Standardized State Assessment (SSA), a phenomenon that came into clearer focus from the beginning to end of the school year. Even in instances when Norah, grounded in her beliefs and values about teaching, resisted the mandated curriculum vis-à-vis text choice, she complied with the more powerful constraint of “proficiency”—a key point elaborated in the following chapter—thus practicing a ‘teach to the test’ pedagogy. The notion of proficiency, ever present in the data, is a thread that is woven throughout this chapter, as it shares an inextricable link with ideas about and uses of “student data” at Lazarus. Although they are deeply intertwined, my goal was to extrapolate these two ideas introduced in chapter 4—“data” and “proficiency”—and bring each into focus, separately, before bringing them back together in order to understand how they work in concert. This chapter, thus, foregrounds the function of the conceptualization of “student data” that mediates planning, while back grounding “proficiency”.

\(^{11}\) I use the term script as a construct that accounts for appropriate participation in routine interactions (Gutierrez, 1993; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Winegar, 1988).
In the previous chapter, the planning meetings were introduced as a support structure that Norah identified as both ‘data-driven’ and optimally useful for effective teaching because “looking at data” helped hold the teachers to a “higher expectation”. In this chapter, I draw on Bloome et al.’s (1989) theoretical construct of procedural display to examine these meetings as sites of meaning-making where teachers co-constructed their understandings of “student data” and ‘data-driven’ planning by acting out the steps prescribed by a school-provided template. The analysis presented here suggests the teachers were ‘doing’ data-driven planning meetings vis-à-vis compliance with the template, however what looked like ‘doing’ data-driven planning was not actually data-driven planning.

**Procedural Planning**

Every Thursday morning, Norah, along with Jamie and Blake, the other fifth grade teachers at Lazarus Elementary, and often times, Emma, the district literacy coach, met for approximately 30 minutes to collaboratively plan reading instruction for the subsequent week. Each of these meetings followed the same format as the teachers diligently adhered to the school-provided template for planning (See Figure 1). In this section I trace the progression of these meetings as they were guided by the school-issued template in order to illustrate the powerful ways the rhetoric of “data” and “proficiency” were present—not always transparent, but present—in this routine practice that, ultimately, instantiated an illusion of ‘data-driven’ instruction. I trace the teacher’s interpretations of the template as they engage in a display of procedures that look like ‘data driven planning.’ The process of deconstructing their understandings of this school-issued tool provides keen insight into how literacy and learning were conceptualized in this setting, how the role of the teacher was defined and, ever so
important, how both teachers and students were positioned by the deficit perspectives that were deeply embedded in the framing of the planning activity then reproduced by the teachers.

**Procedural Display**

Bloome et al. (1989) introduced the idea of procedural display to theorize classroom-based practices that teachers and students displayed in order to ‘do’ required activities, for example, lessons. Doing the activity does not mean that the goal of the activity is realized, only that the steps of doing an activity are performed, thus giving the appearance of successful teaching and learning. These activities, Bloome and his colleagues theorized, are cultural events that are public and semiotic in that the work teachers and students do together derives meaning from the context of the event or, using the same example, the context of the lesson which is, of course, a classroom. Their conceptualization of cultural events is anthropological, grounded in Geertz’s (1973)’s definition of culture as “the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations“ (cited in Bloom et al, 1989, p. 145) Related, and of importance, they emphasize that cultural events are not random as they are performed for purposes relevant and meaningful to the community. In other words, the activities performed in classrooms are organized around the educational goals valued, locally. This theoretical orientation positions Bloome et al. and followers who take up their notion of procedural display to not only describe the actions happening in the event—for example, the classroom lesson—but attach meaning and significance to the actions performed. To do so, they explain, “requires exploring how people build and maintain a system of meanings and significance within which they can interpret behavior and other phenomena.” (p. 269) This specific construct, grounded in a sociocultural perspective of activity, aligns with the theories framing this analysis and provides
a specific analytic tool to theorize how the actions part and parcel of a recurrent event—a weekly planning meeting—that was mediated by the school-provided template worked to create a system of meaning around notions of “student data” and “proficiency”. As an extension to this work, I also bring a critical lens to examine how values and beliefs, rules and regulations tacit in the local context were influenced by assumptions prevailing in state and national settings shaped those locally-defined meanings performed in classrooms and other school and social settings.

As the example provided above suggests, Bloom et al. define procedural display as the procedures that ‘count’ as doing classroom lessons. As they describe, “More formally stated, procedural display is (a) the display by teacher and students, to each other, of a set of academic and interactional procedures that themselves count as the accomplishment of a lesson, and (b) the enactment of lesson is not necessarily related to the acquisition of intended academic or nonacademic content or skills but is related to the set of cultural meanings and values held by the local education community for classroom education” (p. 272). For my purposes, I modified this definition to include (a) the set of procedures the teachers employed to plan the lessons and (b) how the enactment of planning was related to the meanings and values held by the school and district communities, as represented in the template.

Further, in their work on procedural display, Bloom et al. offer four dimensions of distinction between this specific construct and other research on the performative and socializing aspects of schooling that I find useful for my own analytic focus. First, procedural display is cooperatively accomplished between students and teachers. For my analysis, I look at how planning was performed between teachers and the school, as the template created by school officials and required for teachers to follow for their collaborative planning represented school administration. Second, in procedural display either the teacher or the student perspective is
emphasized, with the examples often pointing to ways that teachers, when teachers construe that students do not understand, prompt students to enact the steps that ‘look like’ understanding. For my analysis I argue the perspective privileged was that of the school. Third, they are careful to note that procedural display is not inherently evaluative, but rather their goal is to present analyses that depict the nature of classroom events, not whether or not the events are good or bad, per se. Lastly, procedural display is studied as the core issue, the “thing” that is happening, since procedural display operates as smoke and mirrors might function to mask what is happening beneath what appears to be happening.

Using procedural display as a lens, the next section explicates the steps prescribed by the template and followed by the teachers. Following these steps gave the appearance of ‘data-driven planning’, however, looking under the surface of the teachers’ interactions with the template uncovers a façade of ‘data driven planning’ that served to marginalize more than it did inform robust literacy instruction.

**Look, Learn, Address:**

**Three Steps Toward High-Stakes and Low-Expectations**

**Step 1: Look at Student Data**

Most planning meetings started with the teachers reporting student data. The origins of this practice can be easily traced to the planning template featured in Figure 1. At the top of that template, the first column header is clearly labeled “Look at Student Data”. To understand how and why each meeting consistently followed a routine that began with a report of information that was, in this context, termed “student data”, I asked two questions. First, what does the heading “look at student data” instruct teachers to do? Then, what did the teachers actually do to enact their understandings of this instruction?
What were the instructions? To look is, by Merriam-Webster’s definition, “to ascertain by the use of one’s eyes”. The word “look” implies an act of seeing. It does not, necessarily, imply acts of thinking, examining, understanding or synthesizing. Further, a definition of the term “student data” was not provided which left teachers to interpret what constituted and, importantly, what counted as “student data” in this setting. This was, of course, no small or value-neutral task as the theoretical foundations of this study assume language use, for example
exchanges and interpretations around the use of the word “data”, is always connected to structures of power and dominance.

Questions around the validity and status of qualitative versus quantitative measures of teaching and learning permeate conversations across the educational research community. In response to these questions, some scholars problematize narrow, yet prevailing “white coat” notions of science arguing, instead, for a more complex, nuanced perspective on inquiry that more aptly represents the work of researchers (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003; Erickson & Gutierrez, 2002). In other words, this question of ‘what counts as data’ is asked at every level of research, policy and practice. The teachers’ interpretations of the school-issued template—interpretations that will be presented throughout this chapter—reveal the forms of thinking and talking about “student data” that were accepted in the context of their planning meetings situated within their larger school and district contexts.

How were instructions followed? During the planning meetings, “Look(ing) at Student Data” was enacted as a process of reporting as the teachers recited numbers followed by the letter P, PP or U which represented the number of students in their class who received a score of Proficient (P), Partially Proficient (PP) or Unsatisfactory (U) on their most recent weekly assessment which was, invariably, a written response to the reading. Interpreting the task, “look at student data” as one that asks teachers to report or make public their students’ outcomes maps to a contentious, but common practice in the current climate of teacher evaluations that places teachers on public display for their students’ test scores. One visible example of this can be found in the Wall Street Journal, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the United States, that published the rankings of New York City teachers based on their students’ standardized scores in math and English (Retrieved from http://projects.wsj.com/nyc-teachers/).
Equally as important as the act of “reporting” in response to the instruction “look at student data” is what the teachers were reporting. They reported numbers and they reported letters. “Look at student data” was enacted as reporting—announcing—numbers and letters; weighty, value-laden numbers and letters that derived meaning from their use in this context and functioned, ultimately, to label students, a dimension of the planning meetings I will explicate in a later section of this chapter. While the directive “look at student data” could, potentially, have encouraged teachers to sit with their students’ work samples and qualitatively evaluate what these examples represented about their students’ understandings of reading processes—the very processes of understanding behind the decontextualized quantitative data represented in the number of P, PP and U students—“looking at student data” was instead enacted as the reading off of a faceless, nameless list of numbers and letters.

This act of reporting—an act that functioned to sort, rank and label children who became anonymously known throughout the school year by monikers such as “my proficient kids” or “my U’s”—is akin to “gap gazing”, a critique originating in math education research (Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez & Dixon-Ramon, 2011). As Gutierrez & Dixon-Ramon (2011) write,

> Because gap gazing draws upon one-time cross sections of data, it offers little more than a static picture of inequities with inadequate information about how those inequities were created. In addition, achievement gap studies often fail to question the validity of measurement tools...gap gazing also accepts a static notion of student identity, presuming that students can be reduced to a set of cultural markers, rather than recognizing they are constantly in flux, dependent on the social structures and social relations in which they are engaged.” (p. 23)

When the teachers, in response to the instruction “look at student data” reported numbers of students not by name, but by level of proficiency they share what Gutierrez & Dixon-Ramon describe as “inadequate information” because the picture that was painted told only what the scores were rather than how those scores were generated and what they revealed about learning.
Secondly, the labels of proficiency created groups into which children were sorted, but were so static that there was little room for students to foster nuanced understandings of who they were as readers. (Dutro et al, 2013).

**Deficit perspectives & diminishing expectations.** The directive “look at student data” garnered meaning when the teachers interpreted the task as a call for a report and enacted this understanding of that task by starting their planning meetings reporting quantities of P’s, PP’s and U’s. The actual letters—P, PP and U—used by the teachers to report “student data” mirrored the categories assigned to student performance on the SSA. Of importance, the highest score students could achieve on the SSA was Advanced, represented by an A. And, while some of the fifth grade students at Lazarus Elementary, indeed, scored Advanced on their reading and writing SSA’s during previous years, A’s were never included in proficiency score reporting during planning meetings. Thus, in this case, the omission of this potential score, A, was equally as powerful as the inclusion of the scores denoted by P, PP and U.

The omission of the A functioned as both diminishing and deleterious. When the Advanced score is not recognized as a possibility for all students the exclusion serves to lower expectations. The Advanced score was not for the taking, for all of the students. And because the students who are most often labeled ‘underachieving’ are students of color or students from economically struggling families, questions about who has access to labels of high-achievement and who does not become palpable. Further, even students who did, in fact, prove to score at this level on the state test in a previous year were not acknowledged for their Advanced status. The omission of the Advanced designation functioned to position the students through a deficit lens; through this lens no student is viewed as highly capable, even as capable as some of the students already demonstrated themselves to be.
Of importance, while the letters and numbers reported as “student data” never included the A, in a small number of instances the grade Norah wrote in the students’ response journals where they completed their weekly assessments was a P/A, denoting Proficient/Advanced. Why is this discrepancy important? The act of including an A on a student’s assessment, but reporting only the P when “looking at student data” lends insight into Norah’s understanding of what counts in the context of the school-sanctioned team planning meeting. Omitting the A from her report of numbers and letters suggests that Norah did recognize the A as a possible score for her students, but only in their classroom. The A did not carry from the classroom space into the planning space. Moreover, the distinction between classroom-appropriate scores and planning meeting–appropriate scores suggests that Norah understood the school and district expectation of the teachers was to prepare children to be proficient readers. Proficient was the bar that was set. The goal was not to exceed proficiency, rather just to meet this minimum standard. Student performances that transcended the minimum expectation did not need to be “reported” when “looking at student data”.

An extended discussion of what it meant to be a proficient reader will follow in the next chapter. In this section, my goal was to highlight that the teachers interpreted the phrase “look at student data” that was presented on the planning template as a directive to report data using labels of proficiency that constitute data. My goal was also to show that not all labels were available to all students in the context of the planning meeting where the school-provided template was followed.

Step 2: What Did We Learn from the Data Review?

The question located just below “Look at Student Data” on the template (Figure 1) asked, “What did we learn from the student data review”? There was no response to this question
included on four out of a total of fifteen planning templates. Those blanks represented interruptions to instruction including district assessments or school holidays that resulted in no data having been collected. On the other eleven templates, Norah—who was the designated note taker during planning meetings—responded to this question by listing the name of each teacher followed by the numbers of P, PP and U students they reported. On five of those eleven templates Norah included additional information below the list—typically two sentences summarizing what the teachers believed was the pattern of misunderstanding across the sum total of the fifth grade students. The statements of misunderstanding typically indicated what the teachers believed the students were not doing or were not doing well. For example, consistent with the other planning agendas, in November one completed plan noted (See Figure 5.2 for the corresponding excerpt from this completed template):

Kids aren’t seeing trends through all the pieces of evidence. Synthesizing the evidence. They aren’t use [sic] to taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference.

The pronoun “we” in the question, “What did we learn from the data review”, is collective. It signifies collaboration. However, when the teachers documented what they learned on the planning agenda, they employed an organizational scheme that not only individualized, but named the individual teachers responsible for each break down of P’s, PP’s and U’s. The individualization signals the “higher standard” to which Norah believed teachers were held when they used data in their planning meetings. This individualization is not what the template communicated, it is what Norah and her teammates interpreted and enacted as a display of holding and being held accountable.
Figure 5.2 *Partially completed school-provided planning template*

Team Planning Agenda

Grade:  
Meeting date: 11/17/11  
Start time: 3:00  
Stop time: 3:50

Look at student data  
What did we learn from the data review?

*Norah*  
P-5 PP-5 U-5 (some kids were with sped teachers)

*Blake*  
P-5 PP-6 U-7

*Jamie*  
P-6 PP-7 U-3

Kids aren’t seeing trends through all the pieces of evidence. Synthesizing the evidence. They aren’t use to taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference.

Further, of the five planning templates that included additional notes, there was only one instance when student success or student improvement was highlighted. Of interest, this one instance attributed student improvement to the use of the language structure, a teaching tool introduced at the outset of this chapter. As I will explicate in chapter 7, the language structure played a central role in what counted as assessing and supporting students at Lazarus Elementary. This later analysis of the role of the language structure will point to the ways socialization commandeered learning, a point that is foreshadowed here as fidelity to the language structure was the one and only success highlighted across fifteen planning agendas in response to a question about what teachers learned by reviewing “student data”. Table 5.1 below provides a summary of the four types of responses Norah and her team provided to answer the question “What did we learn from the student data review”? 
Table 5.1 *Frequencies of responses to “What did we learn from the student data review”?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No data reported</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists of teachers and numbers of P, PP, U only</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists of teachers and numbers of P, PP, U plus Summary of what students are not doing/not doing well</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lists of teachers and numbers of P, PP, U plus Summary of what students are doing well</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Looking & Learning.** So, what do these types responses tell us about teaching and learning reading in Norah’s classroom? Eleven of fifteen planning meetings started with Norah, Jamie and Blake sharing their lists of numbers and letters meeting the demands of a school-determined task called, “Look at student data”. And while this finding indicates that planning led with “student data”, giving the appearance of “data-driven”, a closer examination also reveals a murky, if not narrow, definition of the word “data”. “Data” was comprised mostly of decontextualized, depersonalized numbers and letters that represented quantities of competent students. The directive—“Look at student data”—did not explicitly ask teachers to link student data and student performance on state tests; however, the teachers’ interpretation that “student data” was interchangeable with numbers of Proficient, Partially Proficient and Unsatisfactory students reveals an infusion of high-stakes testing discourse into the everyday teaching practices of classrooms. In turn, what counts as student data in classrooms is not easily discernible from what counts as student data from tests.

The concern that arises from this interpretation is the possibility that what counts as learning is defined only by the singular measure of a state test, a dilemma that is both widely addressed in the evaluation and assessment literature and overwhelmingly cautioned against (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Dutro et al, 2013; Linn, 2000; Shepard, 2002). Further, the unavailability of the range of designations of reading success—specifically, the omission of the A that
represented Advanced—illuminates the equity issue inextricably linked with this problematic practice.

How “data” and “proficiency” were being conceptualized—and how this conceptualization functioned—became clearer when the template asked the teachers to leverage student data in order to learn something. Ten of fifteen planning agendas included either no information (due to interruptions to instruction) or a list of the numbers of P, PP and U scores from each teacher’s classroom that week. Only five planning agendas offered information about what the teachers felt they learned or, in other words, what the report of student data meant. This suggests the teachers only learned—or, perhaps, believed they only learned—something from the data 33% of the time or that articulating specific learning from data did not feel necessary in the way reporting proficiency categories clearly did. The implication here is that quantities of P, PP and U scores on a weekly assessment sufficed as both student data and a response to the question, “What did we learn from the student data review?”

Further, and of key importance, if the completed agendas indicated that something was learned from the data review only 33% of the time, then claims of ‘data-driven instruction’ begin to seem unreliable. As discussed in chapter 4, Norah identified planning meetings and professional development as the routines that enabled her to practice what she believed was good teaching. She associated the ‘data-driven’ nature of the planning meetings with rigor and high standards of accountability placing value on these ‘data-driven’ supports that helped her navigate what she called “real-life” teaching. Indeed, as each planning meeting followed the school-issued template and started by “looking at student data”, which teachers interpreted as numbers of Proficient, Partially Proficient and Unsatisfactory students, these meetings had the appearance of ‘data-driven’. However, analysis of the transcripts and completed agendas from these planning
meetings revealed that what was actually happening was not the rich examination of formative and summative assessment that could be implied by “data”. How might we distinguish between instruction that is driven by data and instruction that appears to be driven by data? And why, if the instruction is not actually informed by data that has the potential to enrich instruction, is it so important for teachers, schools and districts to make it appear that this is the case?

**Data & Deficits**: When the template asked the question, “What did we learn from the student data review?”, the teachers did not leverage “student data” to document what was learned about the children’s processes of learning to read. Instead, they listed numbers and letters under each teacher’s name and, in only a handful in instances, wrote a sentence or two noting what the students did not do. As this was the pattern throughout the school year, the interpretation is they included the information that was valued by the reader of the template, the school administrator, then checked that question off the list. Information about what the students and teachers were actually learning together was not privileged.

“Student data” was, however, leveraged as a tool for instantiating a deficit perspective of the children. As explained above and highlighted by Table 5.1, in the small number of instances when the teachers did provide information about what they learned from the data review (beyond just the list of numbers of P’s, PP’s and U’s), the information, with the exception of one time, highlighted what the students were not doing or what the students were not doing well. The question asked teachers what they learned, which opened up a range of possible responses. However, the responses recorded on the completed templates both focused on what was problematic rather than what was successful and, moreover, located the identified problems in the kids. To illustrate this point, Table 5.2 below showcases the five responses the teachers provided to explain what was learned.
Table 5.2

Teachers’ responses to the question: What did we learn from the data review?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>What did we learn from the data review?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>Students are not going back to find specific evidence from the text to support their response. If they are using text support they aren’t connecting back to the claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>Kids aren’t seeing trends through all the pieces of evidence. Synthesizing the evidence. They aren’t use [sic] to taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>We looked at the interim and the topics that we need to focus on are: Figurative language, predictions using text and not only background knowledge, Theme, Inference, Summary with main idea and details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>Students who are getting a P are doing the same work during independent time. Student holds up their book at the end of independent time to show where they got their response. We are noticing students’ turn and talk deeper thinking because of the language structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Norah: Kids who got PP missed the end details when the hitchhiker was discovered as the fingersmith. Jamie: Kids who didn’t get proficient were unorganized Blake: Kids are still over-generalizing main idea or they missed the ending.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is evident in these responses? First and foremost, there was an overwhelming focus on what the students—as if “the students” were one homogenous group of people void of individuality or complexity—were not doing. Two and three sentence summaries were written to suggest that the teachers learned only what the students were not or could not do that they, presumably, should have been doing. This is problematic because it suggests there was one uniform problem across all the fifth grade students. The implication is that all of the students might have been proficient if they simply, by example, went “back to find specific evidence from the text to support their response”.

Moreover, the presumption that the students should have been doing something they were not doing excludes any discussion of what supports were made available to the students to accomplish the expected goal. For example, the students were charged with failing to go “back to find specific evidence from the text to support their response” however the summary of “what
was learned from the data review” did not include discussion of the instructional practices designed and delivered to support students to learn how to find evidence from the text.

One summary, the summary on January 26th, did link student performance with the availability of tools, specifically, the language structure. This summary is also the only one that offered any discussion of what the students were doing and/or doing well. The responses recorded on all of the other agendas were limited to discussion of the students’ shortcomings. So, not only were the students treated as one monolithic group, but what they did not or could not do was highlighted, while successes, skills, and talents were obscured. There is an argument to be made from this evidence that the teachers inserted their own practices into the response when the students were successful, but when the students were not displaying what the teachers perceived as successful, the onus was placed squarely on the children.

Why does an assumption of uniformity and a focus on problems matter? In the sociocultural perspective, learning is conceptualized as shifts in participation (Rogoff, 1994) and processes of becoming (Holland et al, 1998). The theory of learning that was at work in the planning meetings was evident both in how the teachers interpreted the word “learn” in reference to teacher learning in the question “What did we learn from the data review?” and how they wrote about student learning in the five examples presented above in Table 5.2.

First, to answer the question, “what did we learn”, the teachers might have documented how the information gleaned from the “student data” contributed to their understandings of how to support student learning. How might “student data” contribute to a shift in their participation in classroom instructional practices? Instead, two problems emerged. First, “student data” was comprised of little more than numbers and letters disconnected from the learning activities within which students’ were participating when they produced the work assessed as a P, PP or U.
Secondly, the teachers did not seem to be collecting information to “learn”—rather the information collected was then reported and used to identify problems that could be fixed. There were right answers that yielded P’s and wrong answers that yielded PP’s and U’s. Thus, the teachers “learned” how many P’s were produced in a given week and documented why the remaining students did not produce P’s. There was one expected outcome that represented a right answer. The teachers “learned” how many students got the right answer and documented what needed to be fixed in the students who got the answer wrong.

The sociocultural theoretical construct re-mediation provides useful lenses for analyzing ideas about and strategies for “fixing” kids. Re-mediation, defined by Cole & Griffin (1983) as “a shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment” (p.70), shifts the focus away from teaching and toward learning. This shift enables a re-conceptualization of the role of the teacher as a designer, an organizer of an environment where tools are made strategically available so that every child can be smart. Learning environments informed by sociocultural theories of learning and underpinned by re-mediation capitalize on students’ strengths by saturating the context with the tools and forms of assistance that support their learning. Problems of practice are located not squarely in children, but in and distributed across the setting, across the range of tools, people, and mediating devices that constitute the setting. The affordance of the perspective that learning is socially and culturally mediated is that teachers have opportunities to re-organize, to change the social organization of their classroom in order to problem solve rather than trying to fix problems in kids. This approach sets children up to learn rather than suggesting any impediment to learning is in the child.

But, just as teachers locating problems in students is misguided, so, too, is locating problems of practice in teachers. In chapter 4, I discussed the tensions Norah navigated as she
both resisted a ‘teach to the test’ pedagogy, but simultaneously felt palpable pressure from the school and district as well as a responsibility to her students to comply with demands to produce test results. There, I highlighted a key event—the day Norah became emotional when documenting her predictions for her students’ performances on the upcoming SSA during a planning meeting the previous month—as well as the follow-up interview when she shared her reflections on that experience. The deficit view of children enacted by the teachers is complicated by the fact that the teachers were pressured and positioned by the school and district that were also under pressure to increase their test scores as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and other measures of growth are required for schools and districts. The template led with data at a time when rhetoric of data-driven decision-making is ubiquitous even if a definition of what constitutes data is conspicuously missing from the conversation. What mattered in this context is that the teachers were collaboratively planning for instruction and using “data” to inform their decision-making. Following the template enabled them to perform this task, to ‘do’ data-driven planning. The template, as it reified the school’s and the district’s ideas about teachers, teaching, students and learning, also functioned to position not only the students, but also the teachers and set them up to employ a deficit perspective of the students. The third question on the template brings this dimension into clearer focus.

**Step 3: How will we address the misconceptions from the data review?**

The third question asked the teachers to explicate how they planned to “address misconceptions from the data review”. The language of the template directed the teachers’ attention to students’ lack of understanding, which, as I argued above, undermined the potentially more expansive view that could have been supported through the first question on the agenda. The language of the template diverted attention away from the students’ strengths and
towards their weaknesses. Language that encouraged the teachers to build on the students’ strengths would have resulted in a very different set of goals. In other words, the third question represented the way the language in the template the teachers were required to follow underscored a deficit perspective that set the teachers up to reproduce a focus on what children did not or could not do.

In the proceeding chapters I continue to elaborate my discussion of how the template-guided planning meetings maintained the illusion of data-driven practices while the quality of “student data” and depth of thought with which these data were used to inform teaching and learning were misrepresented or, perhaps, misunderstood. To the point of how the planning meetings were organized, however, it is clear the succession of questions on the template the teachers followed for each meeting, ostensibly, asked 1.) Are the students proficient? 2.) If the students are not proficient where do they need support? and 3.) How will the teachers provide targeted support? The goal of instruction was very clearly proficiency and the valued tactic for meeting this goal was data driven planning. As the teachers used “data” and talked about “proficiency”, Norah’s curricular and instructional choices and the reliability of ‘data-driven’ planning are centrally important to this analysis in order to understand how the goal of proficiency influenced decision-making. However, it is key to examine, first, what was meant by ”proficiency” in this context. This contributes to a clearer understanding of how the ‘data-driven planning meetings’ continued to follow the procedural steps that might count as planning, but, I’m arguing, were not at all driven by substantive data. Further, understanding the function of “proficiency”, illuminates the school and district context that enabled this paradox.
CHAPTER 6
Stretching the Rubberband: Resistance within Limits
A Four Resources Perspective on Reading Goals at Lazarus Elementary

As argued in preceding chapters, the word “proficient” was used frequently across the data. Importantly, as chapter 5 highlighted, “proficiency” was value-laden as “student data” were reported in terms of labels of proficiency. Thus, in order to develop an understanding of how proficiency was conceptualized at Lazarus Elementary, I analyzed all 15 completed team planning agendas—one agenda for each of the texts taught during data collection in Norah’s classroom (see Table 1.1), as well as the Promethean Board flip charts¹² for each of these fifteen texts. I argue reading instruction in Norah’s classroom constrained learning opportunities and possibilities for her students in spite of her commitment to push on the district’s nebulous boundaries around what constituted compliance with the mandated program through her use of non-Mondo texts.

Literacy as a Social Practice: The Four Resources Model

For this chapter, I draw specifically on the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1990, 1999), which outlines the specific kinds of literacy practices—organized into four roles—that are necessary for the literate person’s participation in our contemporary social world. The model is grounded in sociocultural and critical perspectives of literacy, conceptualizations of literacy I discussed earlier as central to the framing of my study. One foundational construct in the model is Bourdieu’s notion of habitus which, put simply, is the idea that individuals acquire, over their lifetimes, a sum total of knowledge, skills and practices, referred to as dispositions (Bourdieu, 1998). These dispositions are shaped by and have meaning in the settings in which

¹² As explained in the Methods chapter, each text and the corresponding language structures were scanned then projected, electronically, onto a Promethean Board in the classroom. Students did not receive individual copies of texts and, instead, sat on a carpet, oriented toward the projection board as Norah read the text, prompts and language structures aloud.
individuals participate, giving the meaning making practices part and parcel of these dispositions a particular kind of value. Race, class, gender and ethnicity are embodied in individuals’ dispositions which makes this particular model valuable for arguing from an equity standpoint or studying how particular ways of constructing meaning enable or constrain access to literacy learning in a world where literacy is not negotiable (Luke, 2003).

The Four Resources Model was developed, as Luke & Freebody (1999) later explained in a follow up to their original article, because

It was our position that determining how to teach literacy could not be simply “scientific,” but rather had to involve a moral, political, and cultural decision about the kind of literate practices needed to enhance both peoples' agency over their life trajectories and communities' intellectual, cultural, and semiotic resources in multimediated economies. Literacy education, then, is ultimately about the kind of literate society and literate citizens or subjects that could and should be constructed. (n.p.)

Their position resonates with the challenges to literacy curriculum and instruction that rely on Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR) presented in this dissertation’s Literature Review. Furthermore, Luke & Freebody’s effort to expand what counts as “scientific” aligns with the questions about what counts as “data” raised in chapter 5. They push on narrow, but prevailing ideas about evidence and the implications for young readers and writers whose literacy is imperative for their full membership in society.

Drawing on the Four Resources model, Luke (2011) critiques autonomous models of literacy (Street, 1984) arguing they privilege skill acquisition and fail to create opportunities for students to engage with “the social texts and intellectual demands of everyday community life and institutional and social action.” (p. 150). The Four Resources Model offers a framework for promoting the level of intellectualism and explicit connections between texts and the social world that students need in order to not only reach high levels of achievement, but to sustain them.
The four roles explicated in the model—code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text critic—comprise a repertoire of literacy practices. Each role is equally as important as another as it is the composite of all four roles that is necessary for full participation in authentic literacy practices. Their descriptions of each role include:

- **CODE BREAKER**: break the code of written texts by recognizing and using fundamental features and architecture, including alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, and structural conventions and patterns;
- **MEANING MAKER**: participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account each text's interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems;
- **TEXT USER**: use texts functionally by traversing and negotiating the labor and social relations around them -- that is, by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school, and understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components;
- **TEXT CRITIC**: critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral -- that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people's ideas -- and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways. (1999, n.p.)

Drawing on these roles outlined in the Four Resources Model, my strategy was to determine: 1) What were the foci of reading instruction in Norah’s classroom; 2) Which of the four roles did each instructional focus map onto? and 3) How did the availability of roles shift, if at all, with the instructional foci associated with Mondo texts and instructional foci associated with non-Mondo texts selected by Norah and her team teachers? The goal was to make visible both what conceptualization of a proficient reader was at work in Norah’s classroom and whether or not this conceptualization changed when Norah 'resisted' Mondo by selecting outside texts.

**Four Roles, Twenty Four Objectives**

In connection with the 15 texts (see Table 1.1), 24 objectives, or foci of reading instruction, were named in the completed planning agendas and the flip charts (see Table 6.1).
Table 6.1.
*Frequencies of Foci of Reading Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Instruction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using Evidence from the Text</td>
<td>**********</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>*******</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>*******</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Inference</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary &amp; Main Idea</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Context Clues to Determine Meaning of Unknown Words</td>
<td>*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Connections</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Bias/Author’s Purpose</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Background Knowledge</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause &amp; Effect</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare &amp; Contrast</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figurative Language</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreshadowing</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Text Features</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact versus Opinion</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note taking</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of View</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-reading for Clarity</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolism</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
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Some skills were the explicit focus of instruction for just one story while others were recurring across the year. The foci recurring most frequently included: using evidence from the text (13 times), prediction and inference (8 times) and character inference, summary/main idea, and using
context clues to decipher word meaning (5 times). Later in this chapter, I address the frequency of skills; however, at the most fundamental level, the list of instructional foci makes visible the skills and strategies a fifth grade student at Lazarus would seemingly need to master in order to demonstrate proficiency.

Once I identified the 24 foci of reading instruction, I organized them into Luke & Freebody’s Four Resources categories—code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text critic—in order to better understand reading instruction and the prevailing notion of reading proficiency at work in Norah’s classroom (See Figure 6.1 below). Moreover, using the categories outlined in the Four Resources model also allowed me to make comparisons across Mondo and non-Mondo texts in order to gain insight into how instruction did or did not change when the teachers replaced Mondo texts with supplemental texts of their choosing.

I include Luke & Freebody’s definitions for each role above. However, I wish to elaborate my interpretation of each defined role here in order to provide clarity around how I approached this process of analytic coding. I also map these areas to the Common Core State Standards, as those standards, developing at the time of the study, were known to districts in the state as underlying the state’s own standards revision process.

At the most fundamental level, I most closely associate the ‘code breaker’ role with foundational skills conventionally connected to phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition, and fluency. Standards for these skills are, as described in the introduction to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Foundational Skills in kindergarten through Grade 12, “directed toward fostering students’ understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.” Importantly, and aligned, in part, with the Four Resources framework, the CCSS also
describes these foundational skills not as “an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.“ The skills, in other words, should not be the goal, but should mediate a more robust learning goal.

Skills typically taught under the umbrella of reading comprehension such as making predictions, drawing on background knowledge to make connections to text, asking questions and seeking answers, and summarizing (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Pressley, 2000; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) were assigned to the ‘meaning maker’ role. The CCSS presents these skills under the heading Reading: Literature where nine standards are organized into four component parts: 1) Key idea and details; 2) Craft and structure; 3) Integration of knowledge and ideas and 4) Range of reading and text level complexity. In their study of CCSS anchor standards, Scherff & Rush (2013) found opportunities for teachers to interpret the language presented in the standards and enact pedagogical choices that support higher-order thinking and critical engagement. However, while they are clear that they are hopeful their pre-service teachers will put these robust interpretations into practice, the enactment is ultimately defined by the interpretation. So, while the comprehension skills assigned to the ‘meaning maker’ role may, in certain contexts, actually be leveraged for a higher level reading of texts, in this setting I coded them as ‘meaning maker’ as the skills were taught discretely, one-at-a-time, metaphorically checked off from a list of objectives the district asked students and teachers to complete during the school year. Norah and the other fifth grade teachers taught the skill rather than the comprehension skill as a tool for critical engagement.

One possibility that points to a distinction between the interpretation of comprehension
skills coded as meaning maker in my study and the possibility some researchers suggest is
invoked by the CCSS is discussed by Underwood et al. (2007) in their examination of reading
comprehension at the secondary level through the lens of the Four Resources Model. They name
California and Massachusetts, explicitly, as states with standards that open-up possibility for
reading instruction. However, the high-stakes tests administered in those states are identified as
constraining. Underwood et al. (2007) write, “When we look at the tests employed to measure
reading comprehension in those states, it is clear that the instructional possibilities suggested by
the standards are diminished to the degree that teachers teach to the test rather than to the
standards” (p. 94). I coded the skills as I observed them taught in this context. While these skills
may be taught differently in another classrooms, schools or districts, in Norah’s classroom, they
fell neatly into the ‘meaning maker’ category.

A text user learns to not only draw meaning from the text through, for example,
identifying a text’s main idea, but to also understand the function of that text in its context. For
this reason, I included genre and author’s bias in the text user category. Genre was taught to
suggest that the structure and content of a genre of text are shaped and interpreted by the reader.
Author’s bias was taught in connection with the Mondo text, Water Wonders, about the
devastation caused by tsunamis. Norah and Blake, in particular, wanted the students to make the
connection between the author’s perspective on tsunamis and the message he was presenting in
the text about resources and levels of preparedness that enable countries to anticipate and recover
from natural disaster. The teachers wanted the students to see the connection between the
author’s point of view presented in the text and a larger social issue.

Critical literacy is conceptualized in myriad ways within a range of theoretical
perspectives. Cervetti et al. (2001) explicate the distinction between critical reading and critical
literacy and the assumptions underpinning the contrasting traditions. For clarity, I interpret Luke & Freebody’s text critic role through the lenses afforded by the socio-critical perspective framing this analysis. I define a text critic as a reader who recognizes that there is power imbued in texts and that meaning emerges as inextricably linked to social, cultural, historical and political conditions. Moreover, drawing from Freire (1978), I see text critics as recognizing that literacy is a tool for social change and social transformation. Instruction designed to support students to develop the skills and dispositions to, for example, ask whose perspective is privileged in particular texts or whose perspective is omitted, would have been coded as text critic, had those opportunities been made available.

Figure 6.1.
Four Resources Model for reading instruction foci for all texts

Looking across all fifteen texts, it is overwhelmingly clear that opportunities to participate in all four ‘roles’ were limited for the students in Norah’s classroom. All but two of
the foci of reading instruction fit neatly into only one category—‘meaning maker’. Further, and of importance, across six months, students had no opportunities to be ‘text critics’. The text critic role was, very literally, n/a—not available—to the students at Lazarus Elementary School.

Since the skills and strategies coded as meaning maker are most closely aligned with reading comprehension, it does not seem unusual that 22 of 24 reading instruction foci in a fifth grade classroom fell into the ‘meaning maker’ role. As fifth grade students are approaching their last year of elementary school, it is be expected that comprehension would be emphasized more than de-coding.

What seems less expected is that opportunities for students to use or critically analyze texts were infrequent or altogether absent from a fifth grade classroom. This finding was of particular interest since the implication is that, regardless of text choice, the conceptualization of literacy that was actually operating in Norah’s classroom constrained opportunities for the students to engage with all roles. Interview and planning meeting data suggest that Norah’s goals, when selecting non-Mondo texts, were to provide the students different opportunities than Mondo texts allowed. Why, then, if Norah believed she was providing the students with more expansive opportunities to engage with texts does an analysis of instructional foci reveal this was seemingly not accomplished?

In order to uncover 1) the source of the instructional emphasis presented here vis-à-vis the Four Resources Model, and 2) why these skills were emphasized in spite of Norah’s efforts to create more and richer opportunities with texts, I peeled back another layer and looked to state and district level curriculum data. Those findings are presented in a later section of this chapter. First, however, I want to explicate what I mean when I say that Norah’s intentions were to create
more and, indeed, ‘better’ opportunities that she described, for example, as “picking some texts that are just more engaging…to do some deeper level thinking”.

Creating Opportunities: Navigating Nebulous Boundaries

“Using it for Us”: Perceived Flexibility

Elementary teachers in the Alba School District were required to follow the Mondo Bookshelf curriculum during their reading block. This was the expectation of “real life” teaching as Norah explained it, telling me, “Alba is so pacing guide and this is the curriculum you’re gonna use and this is what you teach.” Of interest, however, her later discussion of professional development, an excerpt of which is provided below, belied Norah’s initial characterization of the district’s curriculum mandate as inflexible.

Norah: Mondo was new my first year
Andrea: mhm
Norah: So we got a lot of professional development around Mondo. And then it’s kind of changed as everybody’s gotten familiar with it and we’ve kind of had a little more flexibility with using supplemental texts
Andrea: mhm
Norah: Or use like this is how we’re gonna teach it and not having to follow those blue lesson plans
Andrea: mhm
Norah: Um, but, our, the first year with Mondo it was like here are your lesson plans you need to follow these just for the fidelity of the curriculum
Andrea: yeah
Norah: But I feel like now we have professional development around how to use
it for us

Andrea: That you feel like is useful?

Norah: Yeah

The conversation around “how to use it for us” and using “supplemental texts”, in particular, was a conversation that continued throughout the school year in Norah’s classroom and during team planning meetings. Whether or not the teachers were truly ‘allowed’ to use supplemental texts, or stray from the curriculum, in general, is a question that went unanswered. What did become evident across data sources, however, were blurred boundaries around how much flexibility was accepted and what form the flexibility could really take. As I explain below, these blurred boundaries lent insight into what Norah was actually ‘navigating’ and how she did this.

Norah, initially, described Alba as a district that dictated “this is what you teach,” but her discussion of the professional development she identified as useful suggested there was more latitude than that. She explained that Mondo was new her first year in the district and indicated that, for this reason, there was “a lot of professional development around Mondo”. She then highlighted a shift stating, “it’s kind of changed as everybody’s gotten familiar with it,” which suggests that professional development was no longer “around Mondo” after the teachers gained familiarity with the program. She used “and” to highlight an additional shift that occurred as “everybody’s gotten familiar with it” sharing, “and we’ve kind of had a little more flexibility with using supplemental texts”. So, when the program was new in her first year, the professional development organized by the district was “around Mondo”. But, in Norah’s explanation, that changed, to a degree, after the teachers learned the program and were afforded “a little more flexibility.”
The implication in the word “flexibility” is that the teachers were, previously, required to comply with a scripted implementation of the Mondo program, however, by Norah’s fifth year, this was no longer the expectation. However, she qualified “flexibility” stating, “flexibility with using supplemental texts”. In this statement, Norah both touted latitude with the mandated curriculum, but also pointed to the limits on that latitude. There was flexibility, but that flexibility looked like a specific practice: using supplemental texts. She extended her portrayal of “flexibility” adding the statement, “Or use like this is how we’re gonna teach it and not having to follow those blue lesson plans”. Flexibility with the Mondo program included using supplemental texts and/or teaching a Mondo text in ways the teachers wanted to teach it rather than necessarily deferring to the steps outlined in “those blue lesson plans”.

In her fourth turn in the transcript above, Norah set up the shift in expectations, again, by returning to the more stringent expectations originally imposed with the introduction of Mondo during her first year. She stated “Um, but, our, the first year with Mondo it was like here are your lesson plans you need to follow these.” Her use of the word “but” indicates a contrast between now and then and signaling a very different set of expectations now as juxtaposed with then.

Of interest, Norah followed her description of the first year expectations with “just for the fidelity of the curriculum”. The word “just” in her sentence functions to minimize the strict expectations of the district to follow the Mondo program to the letter. It centers the district’s rationale for those strict expectations on the idea that fidelity was inherently important to the curriculum and, thus reasonable, rather than a function of potentially unreasonable district oversight.

Norah’s first four responses in this interaction were explanatory. She was sharing facts: Mondo was new, when Mondo was new professional development focused on using Mondo,
expectations for Mondo compliance have changed over time, and these are the sanctioned practices that signal that change. But, Norah’s fifth response was affective. Her talk shifted from purported statements of fact to expressions of feeling. She said, “I feel like now we have professional development around how to use it for us”. Embedded in this line was not only Norah’s feeling, but the suggestion that, perhaps, the professional development was not expressly or explicitly designed to support teachers’ flexible use of the program, rather she feels it functioned this way. In other words, she did not indicate that the district officially or intentionally released teachers from strict fidelity after the initial launch of the curriculum, but, regardless, Norah felt some license to exercise her “little bit of flexibility”.

**What “Flexibility” Means**

Indeed, data show that Norah did take latitudes with the curriculum, capitalizing on the flexibility she perceived and the tools she believed professional development afforded her. She did this, as explicated in Chapter 4, because she felt that using supplemental texts was “necessary”. What remained uncertain, however, were the parameters around flexibility. What did “using it for us” look like? Although her words signal a lack of clarity, she also suggested a softening of the district’s initial hard line on what it meant to use the curriculum with fidelity. The ambiguity of the parameters is revealed in the transcript below.

Andrea: Do you feel, generally, like [Mondo] materials are useful?

Norah: Uh I think that they’re useful. Umm, to a certain extent. I think they’re a good like base to- like a good foundation, I guess.

Andrea: mhm

Norah: And then pulling in other things to supplement it and to enrich it is necessary
Andrea. Mm

Norah: For an effective literacy curriculum, or literacy block, whatever

Andrea: Yeah. So, you’re allowed to do that?

Norah: Now we are.

Andrea: Ok

Norah: Ki- mm kind of. I mean it’s expected that Mondo is your main curriculum … I think I mean like nobody’s gonna like come in and check my lesson plans to make sure I’ve done Mondo every single day.

Andrea: Right

Norah: But I think in our team plannings and like the sheets that we turn in if they started noticing like oh wow they haven’t used a Mondo text in two months

Andrea: mhm

Norah: That would be a problem

Andrea: Yeah. So you guys just keep—

Norah: Yeah

Andrea: Kinda doing a dance

Norah: Exactly. And obviously we have to pull in SSA prep kind of stuff.

When I asked Norah, “Do you feel, generally, like [Mondo] materials are useful?” she hedged, briefly, inserting “uh” before responding, “I think that they’re useful.” She followed her response with an extended “um” then qualified her response with the clause “to a certain extent.” Norah acknowledged the utility of the Mondo program when prompted by my question, but her hesitance and statement that it was useful to an extent also downplayed the suggestion that the Mondo materials were “useful”. She explained her perspective elaborating, “I think they’re a
good like base to- like a good foundation, I guess,” but that “pulling in other things to supplement it and to enrich it is necessary”.

Norah indicates that the Mondo program, on its own, was not sufficiently useful and, thus, she “pulled in other things”. This practice—“pulling in other things”— was necessary she explained for “an effective literacy curriculum, or literacy block, whatever”. Norah’s language suggests she could only achieve her instructional goals by “supplementing” and “enriching” the Mondo program. Pinning down those goals, however, is complicated.

Then & Now

The ambiguity in Norah’s sense of the district’s expectations came into clearer focus when Norah responded to my question about whether she was allowed to do the supplementing and enriching she identified as necessary for effective literacy instruction. Implicit in her response “now we are” was a reference to the change in district expectations from her first to her fifth year in terms of fidelity compliance. I accepted her response “now we are” by saying, “ok”; but, in her next turn of talk she back peddled, diminishing the certainty in her statement “now we are”. She started to say “kind of”, but interrupted herself, inserted an “mmm” to suggest she was choosing her words with care, then proceeded to use “kind of” to qualify her earlier statement. She then said, “I mean it’s expected that Mondo is your main curriculum”, inserting ambiguity into the earlier “now/then” juxtaposition of the changes in the district’s flexibility that seemingly unfolded from Norah’s first to her fifth year. Norah further explained, “I think I mean like nobody’s gonna like come in and check my lesson plans to make sure I’ve done Mondo every single day”, which suggested the flexibility was unofficial and, as discussed above, more related to a felt sense that a small amount of flexibility was possible. In this exchange, Norah’s language
suggests that although the district did not police the teachers in the sense of checking daily lesson plans, Norah understood that she *should* be following the curriculum.

**Monitoring the “Main Curriculum”**

However, in Norah’s next turn in the transcript, she shared, “But I think in our team plannings and like the sheets that we turn in if they started noticing, like, ‘oh wow, they haven’t used a Mondo text in two months’…that would be a problem.” With this statement, Norah acknowledged that there were indeed monitoring practices in her school. She shared that no one would check her lesson plans to make sure she had done Mondo “every single day”, however, she immediately indicated that “they” monitored the completed templates, as “noticing” assumes that their eyes are on the templates. In the process of noticing patterns in the teachers’ use of curriculum, their response would be surprise (oh, wow) and this surprise would be a problem if it was discovered that “they”, this time indicating her team, had gone any significant time without “using a Mondo text”. In this exchange, two months seemed to serve as an in-the-moment example of what would clearly count as a problematic period of departure (rather than an explicitly stated district rule). So, somewhere between using Mondo every day and not using Mondo texts for two months was an implementation of the program that Norah felt was ‘allowed’ and, perhaps, what was felt as flexibility was a level of supplementing the Mondo curriculum that could stay under the radar of the noticing process of those doing the monitoring.

**Doing a Dance**

What’s important from these transcripts is they illustrate the amorphous boundaries on expectations Norah felt and negotiated. She felt expectations had shifted during the five years she was a teacher at Lazarus, but she could not pinpoint precisely how much flexibility she was afforded in comparison to her first year when total compliance was the expectation. She talked
about flexibility, but she talked about expectations that Mondo was the “main curriculum”. It’s not clear what this meant and how this was enforced. While Norah did not feel she was being policed, she also knew the planning templates she completed each week served as a tool for the administration to monitor her fidelity to the program and that it would be a “problem” if these planning sheets suggested she was not using Mondo as her main curriculum. I described her choices as a dance asking Norah, “So you guys just keep…kinda doing a dance,” using the metaphor to indicate the district’s expectations as the “lead” and the teachers as “follower” who were trying to anticipate and respond to the lead’s moves in a kind of unrehearsed waltz of curriculum accountability. Norah responded, “exactly.

But, in one of the most interesting turns of the transcript, Norah says, “And obviously we have to pull in SSA prep kind of stuff”. If determining and negotiating flexibility in the mandated curriculum was akin to a complicated dance, the least complicated aspect of her negotiation of curriculum compliance seemed to be the tacit understanding that test prep was integral to her teaching. She used the adjective “obviously” to describe the fact that using or not using Mondo aside, it was clear and expected—normative—that she “pull in SSA prep”. And she tacked it on to the end of our exchange, almost as a disclaimer.

**Following the Curriculum: A Matter of Text Choice**

Emma, the district literacy coach, reinforced the ambiguity of boundaries and the uncertainty around latitude and flexibility. During an interview, Emma discussed the district’s plans for revising the district’s pacing guides sharing one anticipated change which included the addition of a “teacher’s choice” text selection once every five weeks. To this point she noted, “Because it’s kind of nice as a teacher to have a little freedom…but not too much”. So, what is this elusive sweet spot? How much freedom was just enough, but not “too much”? In the
interview excerpt below, I asked Emma this question in relation to Norah and her co-teachers, specifically.

Andrea: They use Mondo and non-Mondo texts.

Emma: Mhm

Andrea: So, then, the question is, where is the line? What if they threw out the Mondo texts altogether and only used their own? Would that be ok or not ok?

Emma: I would say not ok. But, I think the ones the fifth grade has chosen have been great. I mean they did a really great job selecting them. If they weren’t good texts then I would be very leery about them doing that.

In this interview excerpt, Emma corroborated Norah’s interpretation that the curriculum was flexible, but only to a point. She stated, “Because it’s kind of nice as a teacher to have a little freedom…but not too much,” and that disregarding the Mondo curriculum, altogether, was not “ok”, but using both Mondo and “teachers choice” texts was ok. Because she spoke of allowing a supplemental text less than once a month as something that was a new and upcoming development in the district, Emma seemed to hold assumptions that most teachers were not currently making their own texts choices for instruction. She then indicates she knows of the fifth grade teachers’ use of some teacher-selected texts, describing those texts as “great”, which quelled her inclination to be “leery” of the fifth grade team’s departure from Mondo. Her use of “not too much” and “leery” reinforce a position of authority over teachers, one in control of the degree and kind of freedom teachers can exercise. Further, she is a skeptical authority, who, as the definition of leery indicates, is “wary due to realistic suspicions” of what teachers will do with any freedom they are allowed. This exchange also suggests that approved departures from the program lie in the quality of the selected texts: “supplement texts” according to Norah,
“teacher’s choice” as labeled by Emma. Thus, both Norah—a teacher—and Emma—a district literacy coach—acknowledge that flexibility was allowed, however, neither of them were able to clearly articulate what sanctioned flexibility looked like or what the limits were. Nonetheless, it was clear that text choice was central to what flexibility did or might mean.

**Cool, Real, Special Books**

While the parameters around curriculum compliance may not have been clear, Norah did engage in an ongoing negotiation of the nebulous parameters for several reasons. For one, the data show that Norah saw flexibility with the Mondo program as *necessary*. Secondly, there were factors that Norah saw as enabling a flexible use of the program, with support from her colleagues, among them. But, there were also salient factors that were clearly constraining the ways Norah flexibly used the Mondo curriculum, with SSA test-prep being key among those. Thus, Norah felt she must and could push on, but could not totally disregard boundaries, a tension that was represented in the transcripts of interviews with both Norah and Emma.

There are two layers of struggle evident there. The most obvious struggle was around the school’s expectations of whether or not the teachers were required to use Mondo and what it meant to use Mondo as the “main curriculum”. But, of importance, embedded in that struggle was also one of ideology. As chapter 4 illustrated, Norah’s goals for teaching and learning included fairness, respect, high expectations for which, she told me, she strived to hold her students accountable and an emphasis on skills such as problem solving that are useful in life. As I discussed in that earlier chapter, the ideology embedded in her expressed goals aligned with a social practice view of literacy. Further, she positioned her views of literacy in contrast to the ideology embedded in Mondo and in ‘test prep’ approaches to teaching literacy, even as she identifies test prep and the mandated curriculum as “real life” teaching. Thus, as discussed in that
earlier chapter, these two perspectives—a social practice take on literacy and a test-prep pedagogy—are perceived to be in tension in Norah’s day-to-day teaching life, as represented in the “dance” around using Mondo or not and, further, teaching to the test or not. She spoke of that latter discord in the following interview excerpt that I first shared in chapter 4.

Norah: I feel like I want [the students] to leave my classroom with skills they can take with them throughout life.

Andrea: mhm

Norah: Like not just did you learn fractions, but did you learn how to be a learner? And did you learn how to

Andrea: Right

Norah: Problem solve… For them to be successful in the rest of their school and in life.

Andrea: Do you think about SSA?

Norah: Yeah. I mean, it’s hard not to. I try not to ya know teach to the test. Like this is on SSA so we have to teach it or this isn’t on SSA we don’t have to teach it, but it’s hard because I mean SSA’s huge. I mean, that’s just what it is.

Ultimately, Norah was striving to be the teacher she described; the teacher who afforded her students opportunities to develop the skills that would serve them in the authentic contexts of their lives. But, she was, in reality, a teacher who also understood that the expectations of her district context included compliance with Mondo as a “main curriculum”. The school’s parameters around using the district’s mandated reading program were quite nebulous, but parameters and the implicit threat of consequences for noncompliance are clearly present. The dissonance, it seems, emerged when Norah saw the blurred lines as opportunities to be the teacher she wanted to be. However, like a rubber band that can only stretch so far before it snaps
back, Norah pushed on the boundaries until she felt constraints that rendered the boundary blurry, but not permeable. Norah expanded and stretched to the point that felt possible, but stopped before the tension became too taut to comfortably hold.

**Pushing Boundaries with Purpose**

Norah did negotiate her use of the curriculum (and the imposed boundaries, blurry or not) and did so with purpose—purposes that may not, as the Four Resources model enables us to see, have been realized. First and foremost, she wanted her students to enjoy reading; a goal she saw as fundamentally connected to the text. She explained,

> Ya know, I think it takes that special book to get you into it and then I think, to make, like your teachers making it enjoyable and I don’t feel like I had any teachers do that for me.

When I asked Norah how she did this—how she provided opportunities for her students to access those special books—she provided examples that were each connected to specific students in her class.

For example, Norah talked about Alfonse, a bilingual special education-labeled student who read English at a kindergarten level. She shared that he was, at that time, reading a non-fiction book about volcanoes that was far beyond his ability level, but he loved it and was able to access meaning through photos and captions. She talked about how much more engaged he was with the volcano book than many of the texts suited to his assessed reading level.

Norah also talked about the importance of knowing the students and their interests. She shared an example of her student, Jake, who she believed might be interested in Brian Selznick’s *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. She loaned him a copy from the classroom library and, indeed, Jake was interested. In fact, Norah described him as excited; so excited that Etienne, another
student in the class, could not wait to read it when he was finished. The following excerpt, which follows our discussion of Alfonse, Jake and Etienne, represents a key reason that Norah felt so compelled to adapt her use of the mandated reading program.

Andrea: Um, but so, all those books that you named are not books that come with your program.

Norah: {laughter} No.

Andrea: {laughter}

Norah: I have never seen any of ‘em like pick up a Mondo book and be like this is the most amazing book ever.

It is clear from Norah’s response that she relegated the Mondo texts to a lower status than other kinds of books. She described what student engagement and excitement looked like when she shared the stories about Alfonse, Jake, and Etienne. Of interest, by sharing these boys’ stories she also described engagement and excitement across students who each consistently performed as U, PP and P students, respectively. Regardless of the categories imposed to sort kids and assign them labels of proficiency, the students were most engaged and most excited with non-Mondo books. When Norah stated, “I have never seen any of ‘em like pick up a Mondo book and be like this is the most amazing book ever,” she makes clear this was not an anomaly unique to Alfonse, Jake, and Etienne. She had seen students captivated by books. The captivating books were just “never” Mondo books.

The transcript below is an excerpt of Norah’s discussion about the ways this distinction between the two types of texts—Mondo texts and non-Mondo texts—informed her approach to teaching and learning reading in her classroom.
Norah: We were talking in our team meeting yesterday about picking some texts that are just more engaging

Andrea: mhm

Norah: And force them to do some deeper level thinking

Andrea: mhm

Norah: ‘Cause those Mondo books aren’t deep books

Andrea: Right.

Norah: Like they can’t practice those higher-level thinking skills with the Mondo books

Norah stated, very clearly, that the kids were not captivated by the Mondo texts, which juxtaposed with her descriptions of their responses to books such as *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* or one about volcanoes. In her follow up, as chronicled in the excerpt above, she began to make explicit connections between the children’s engagement with texts and the implications of their level of engagement on learning to read. Norah noted earlier that the students in her classroom never picked up Mondo stories and expressed the same level of enthusiasm they did for their most preferred texts. In the excerpt above, she talked about how this engagement is linked to “deeper level thinking” and “higher-level thinking skills”. Her contention with the Mondo books was not superficial. She believed texts needed to be engaging in order for the students to have opportunities to develop their deep and high-level thinking skills. The Mondo texts, she believed, precluded this possibility for her students.

In this excerpt below, the link Norah made between the students’ levels of engagement and the kind of thinking those levels of engagement enabled them to do was extended to include what Norah called “real literature from real authors”. Norah’s talk indicates that she did not
believe the students responded to Mondo books with enthusiasm nor did she think the Mondo books were viable tools for supporting the students to develop their deep and high-level thinking skills. The suggestion is that Mondo books were not interesting or exciting, nor were they suited to support robust learning. The excerpt below, however, highlights that Norah positioned Mondo books not only as banal or inadequate tools for literacy learning—she did not even think of them as “real books”. They were texts masquerading as “real literature”.

Norah: I think like supplementing in real literature from like real authors that is rich and deep

Andrea: mhm

Norah: Is necessary. ‘Cause if we just did Mondo, I can guarantee even the kids who liked to read prior would not enjoy reading just Mondo books

In Norah’s view, the quality of the texts offered by Mondo was directly implicated in the children’s opportunities to learn. Without opportunities to engage with rich literature, deep literature, the students were subject to texts that failed to excite them and learning experiences that were limited to something both superficial and artificial.

As previously discussed, of the fifteen books Norah planned for and taught during data collection, eight, or about half the total books, were non-Mondo texts. Looking across data sources at her informal sorting and ranking of texts, it became clear that those eight books were selected because they were the “cool books”, the “special books” written by “real authors” and, thus, the books that Norah felt represented a way she could achieve her goals and mitigate the consequences of the curriculum constraints on learning and engagement.
**Standardizing a Proficient “Meaning Maker”**

When Norah and Emma, the district literacy coach, talked about compliance with the mandated program—as evidenced in the preceding section—they, typically, talked about it in terms of using the Mondo books. In other words, fidelity was negotiated around the text, with the implicit and, in Norah’s case, explicit assumption that the texts themselves intervened significantly in children’s opportunities for rich engagement in “higher-level” literacy processes. However, the data show that regardless of text—Mondo or non-Mondo—Norah and the other fifth grade teachers were organizing instruction in order to prepare students for the SSA. Thus, even the richest tools (e.g. wonderful children’s literature) were rendered mundane. Why, when the teachers chose non-Mondo texts for the expressed purpose of supporting deep thinking and high engagement didn’t the text matter? As I contend below, the answer may lie in the conceptualization of proficiency that was operating in Norah’s school context. To explore this idea, I discuss the district “pacing guides” and state standards as context for further analysis of how ideas surrounding proficiency functioned in the instruction planned by Norah and her fifth grade colleagues.

**District Level**

Alba School District included a reading instruction pacing guide on their website, which was adapted from state department of education curricular guides. The pacing guide was a five-page PDF document available for download by the general public. The first page was dedicated to concepts of print, phonemic awareness, cueing systems and fluency. The next two and a half pages addressed reading comprehension (e.g. main idea, prediction and differentiate fact from opinion) and, important to this analysis, included the Mondo *Bookshelf* texts that mapped to particular skills. The final pages included pacing guides for vocabulary and homework ideas.
The pacing guide did not include reading processes or skills, such as generating, analyzing or synthesizing that might be supported in a fifth grade classroom using, as one example, Raphael’s (1982, 1986) Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) model that invites students to move beyond “right there” questions and respond, instead to “think and search” questions and might suggest a more expansive view of literacy learning. Nor did the pacing guide include suggestions for texts outside the Mondo program (this was an anticipated change that Emma shared they would introduce the following school year). In other words, limited opportunities to engage with ‘text user’ and ‘text critic’ roles represented in Norah’s planning agendas and Promethean charts indexed the focus found in the district’s pacing guides.

**State Level**

The district pacing guide was adapted from state-level curriculum guides, so the next step was, of course, to turn to those state-level materials. Six general standards for reading and writing comprised what the state entitled Model Content Standards: Reading and Writing. Within each of these six general standards were lists of specific components of the standard followed by sections that outlined expectations for readers and writers in three grade level clusters: K-4, 5-8 and 9-12. Four of the six standards focused on or included reading (the other two standards focused on writing):

- **Standard 1**—Students read and understand a variety of materials
- **Standard 4**—Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing
- **Standard 5**—Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources
- **Standard 6**—Students read and recognize literature as a record of human Experience

Possible connections between the standards and the foci of reading instruction in Norah’s classroom were evident. First and foremost, there was a clear link in terms of noticeable absence
of opportunities for students to be ‘text critics’. There was no state standard for critique in grades K-4 or 5-8. It was not until grades 9-12 that the last bullet point under Standard 4 read: 

*Critiquing the content of written work and oral presentations.* Secondly, most of the skills I coded as ‘meaning maker’ were found in state Standard 1. The overwhelming focus on reading comprehension found in Norah’s classroom indexed the district pacing guide, which indexed the state standards. In other words, delimited opportunities for students to have experiences with all four reading roles started at the state level and were represented from there down to the Alba district to Lazarus Elementary School to Norah’s fifth grade classroom.

It might be argued that Norah’s instruction was standards-driven, which would be interpreted by some as the marker of successful classroom teaching. However, a close look at the connections between standards and the foci of instruction were telling only part of the story around proficiency in a school that very clearly led with proficiency or, more specifically, with P’s, PP’s and U’s.

**Guided by Standards, Driven by “Proficiency”**

The state standards could provide a useful heuristic for instructional planning at Lazarus. However, data from the planning meetings—including language used by the teachers and language represented in the planning template—suggested that proficiency was driving instruction more than standards were guiding it. Thus, at the heart of this analysis, there remained an important question about if or how this conceptualization of a proficient reader was connected to the conceptualization of literacy found in the standards, let alone in the more expansive vision of literacy represented in the Four Resources Model. It was this conceptualization or, more to the point, Norah’s interpretation of this conceptualization that was most consequential, since standards can, indeed, create possibilities for learning that are then
undermined by teachers’ narrow interpretations of those standards (Beach, 2011; Underwood et al., 2007). This narrow interpretation is frequently derived not from a teacher’s shortcomings, but rather is the result of conflating standards designed to guide learning with the high-stakes state tests that purport to assess learning (Frederiksen & Collins, 1989; Resnick & Resnick, 1991) and, with an increasing frequency, are levied as the measure of teacher effectiveness (Badolato, 2007; Baker et al., 2010). In what follows, I turn to the team planning data to examine Norah’s interpretation of proficiency.

**Planning & Proficiency**

As I showed earlier, since all but two foci of reading instruction across all fifteen texts were coded as meaning maker, there was clearly little qualitative distinction between instructional planning for Mondo versus non-Mondo texts. The data on the overall number of skills and strategies taught over six months raised two questions, however. First, why were some skills and strategies taught with greater frequency than others (see Table 6.1)? For example, why was ‘using evidence from the text’ taught 13 times? Why were prediction, inference and using context clues to decipher word meaning included as foci of instruction more often than other skills and strategies? Second, how did the teachers determine if students were “proficient” when as many as five skills and strategies were all taught with one text?

To answer those questions, I share a key finding related to not only teaching, but also assessment. To illustrate this, I turn to the example of prediction as a comprehension strategy. Across fifteen books, prediction was a skill that was taught eight times. Prediction appeared in the state standards one time and in the district pacing guide once per quarter. It did not appear more frequently than other reading comprehension skills. However, in Norah’s classroom, prediction was taught eight times. I looked across data sources to find out why prediction seemed
to garner more instructional time than other strategies. Then, because each planning meeting started with a report of student data, as documented in chapter 5, it was crucial to consider not only how often prediction was taught, but how many times prediction was assessed. If, as I argue, proficiency was driving instruction and prediction was a skill taught numerous times during the study, we might presume that prediction was a skill the students needed to master in order to demonstrate proficiency. However, my findings suggest something less clear than a direct correspondence between skills taught and skills assessed.

In examining the data from the planning meetings to examine how Norah and her teammates were determining what skills and strategies would be the focus of instruction for each text, I found that decision-making was haphazard in the sense that teachers did not make choices about what to teach based on an established conceptual framework of literacy learning. It was systematic, however, in the sense that Norah, her co-teachers and, often times, the district literacy coach, made decisions by following the directions on the school-provided template that emphasized a definition of proficiency as determined by the state test. The following vignette presents a snapshot of this aspect of instructional planning.

***

Planning for Proficiency
A Vignette

On January 5th, Emma, the district literacy coach attends the fifth grade team’s planning meeting. The team sits down together to select the Mondo text they will teach the following week. Emma suggests that “from now until SSA maybe focusing on what they’re really weak on when you do the strategies”. She points to the teaching guide for the selected story, Women of the American Revolution: Sybil Ludington, a Mondo text. She notes the teaching focus, prediction, is a strategy the students already know and
suggests planning, instead, for strategies the students “need”. (Need, of course, for the state test since Emma initiates this conversation by presenting this as a planning strategy for the timeframe: “from now until SSA”.)

Before determining a focus of instruction for the selected text, the teachers decide to look at the students’ district interim test score report in order to assess the students’ performance and plan for the strategies where they most “need” support. As it turns out, one of the questions the students missed with the greatest frequency was a question that assessed their ability to make predictions. The teachers then share anecdotes about their students discussing when they are and are not able to successfully make predictions. Blake—who shares that his students are “horrible at predictions”—notes that his students perform best when their predictions are connected to higher quality texts. Norah shares that her students perform better when their prediction responses are scaffolded by a specific kind of language structure.

The teachers thus determine, based on the students’ interim exam scores, that the students need the greatest support with prediction, figurative language, theme, inference and summary with main idea and details. They include each of these skills into their planning for the upcoming story.

***

This vignette from the January 5th planning meeting represents the organization of the
meetings introduced in chapter 5. The first question—*Are the students proficient?*—was asked, implicitly, by Emma who suggested planning for the skills and strategies the kids “need…from now until the SSA”. The assumption was that the students were not yet proficient in all areas where they *needed* to be proficient, as defined by the state exam.

The second question—*If the students are not proficient where do they need support?*—was explicit in Emma’s question and subsequently answered by “student data” from the district-administered interim tests. The teachers and district coach looked at the score report to determine what skills needed to be taught in preparation for the upcoming SSA. Of interest, the district coach’s hunches about the skills the students most needed were inaccurate. She, initially, suggested dismissing prediction as a focus of instruction since the kids “already knew how to predict”. This is worth mentioning since test preparation was centrally important to this conversation, but Emma did not appear to have an informed or accurate understanding of the children and who they were as readers in these classrooms.

The third question—*How will the teachers provide targeted support?*—was embedded in the task of “focusing on what they’re really weak on when you do the strategies”. The deficit language was evident in Emma’s question. The teachers’ answer to the question was revealed, first, when Blake and Norah shared their insights about the conditions that enable their students to perform well at prediction and, second, when they took all the strategies for which the fifth graders did not score well on the interim test and included them all in the plans for the next text. Moreover, the teachers’ responses began to uncover how they saw particular tools—quality texts and the language structure—as connected to student success.

An interpretation of this key event provides some insights into how instructional decisions were made during team planning meetings, but also provides an understanding of what
informed the steps of my analysis. First, it is clear that planning for reading instruction from the first week in January through the SSA—administered over two weeks during March—was driven by the goal to prepare students for the test. Second, each of the skills and strategies were evaluated as separate, testable skills—discrete tasks disconnected from each other as well as disconnected from literacy as a practice that has purpose and relevance outside of test-taking.

‘Data-driven’ instruction was paramount in this setting where proficiency was the coin of the realm and ‘data-driven’ planning and instruction was the circulating discourse that was required of teachers and was assumed to be the mechanism that would make it possible for Norah to fulfill the expectation that her students attain proficiency. However, the only information about students that appeared to be taken up as “data” were quantities of P, PP and U and, thus, the central goal of each planning meeting was to plan for instruction that would boost those numbers each week. The numbers of children assigned to each category were attached to assessments teachers were expected to use as part of the Mondo program. Further, although 24 reading skills were the foci of instruction, only five skills were ever actually assessed and reported during the meeting. Therefore, to be deemed a “P” or Proficient, the students would need only to master five skills. Although it was not yet crystal clear what was meant by “proficiency” as it functioned for the teachers in their planning meetings, the picture that was coming into increasingly clearer focus was of a narrower and narrower image of a proficient reader. In the next chapter, I focus, centrally, on the language structures as these tools were instrumental for further understanding what was meant by proficiency, how the teachers believed they needed to support the students to achieve proficiency and how the students were demonstrating the level of proficiency that earned them the P, PP or U label.
Lankshear and Lawler (1987) suggest that just as there are discourse practices at work in schools to socially construct literacy, there are discourse practices at work in schools that socially construct illiteracy, as well. At the nexus of uninspired literature, data constituted by little more than letters representing an idea of proficiency that was all-powerful, yet could not be pinned down, and the looming presence of a high-stakes test, was a tool present at every turn: the language structure. In this chapter, I discuss the language structure, how it was a tool used with the intention of supporting students to achieve proficiency, but was, instead, a tool that functioned to socialize children to read and respond to texts using rote, for-the-test practices. As I show in the following sections, my data suggest that the language structures contributed to a view of literacy so impoverished it was, arguably, a form of illiteracy. Furthermore, the language structure functioned as a tool not only for instruction, but as a means to conflate teaching and assessing. The language structures were discussed exhaustively in planning meetings, on the agendas teachers turned in each week, and during classroom instruction, but it was not until the last week of the school year, days before Norah and the students were scheduled to begin their summer vacations, that Norah, reflecting on the year, acknowledged the language structures were problematic. They enabled the students to perform proficiency, but not to actually learn how to be proficient readers.

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of the myth of data-driven planning introduced in chapter 5 in order to further tease out the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. I argue that data were used not as much for the planning of instruction, but instead for the planning of assessment. Chapter 6 noted that 24 skills and strategies were taught over the course of six
months; however, opportunities to participate in a range of roles were limited as the overwhelming majority of these 24 skills landed squarely in the ‘meaning maker’ category and none of them met the criteria of the ‘text critic’. This finding suggested that even when Norah tried to supplement Mondo using richer texts—a move she made often and with the intention of creating meaningful experiences with literacy—it mattered little, if at all. As the chapters leading up to this point have illustrated, Norah’s moves to push back on the Mondo curriculum in order to create points of entry into these meaningful experiences with robust texts were not just undermined, but consumed by a narrow notion of proficiency and a demand for a test-prep pedagogy. The language structure is a salient manifestation of how these two influences were operationalized—a kind of literacy was privileged and a kind of test-prep was enacted through the use of this tool. This chapter contextualizes and describes the language structure and then, first, traces the ways the language structure did the work of socializing teachers and students and, second, represented the means by which the test socialized teachers and students into what it meant to teach and learn reading.

**Conflating Teaching & Tests: Data-Driven Planning for Proficiency**

As presented early in my analysis (see Table 1.1), 24 skills and strategies were taught in association with the fifteen texts included in whole group reading instruction during the six months I collected data in Norah’s classroom. Of importance, however, for the thread of analysis presented in this chapter, is that only five of these skills and strategies were assessed (Figure 7.1). “Proficiency” at Lazarus Elementary—a goal that was ever present, yet, never defined—was mastery of five skills, a relatively small number considering the weight the P, PP and U labels imposed.
Figure 7.1. *Types of Assessments*

**Assessments**

- Inference
- Summary
- Multiple Choice
- Author’s Purpose
- Compare & Contrast

Inference was the skill assessed most frequently. Across fifteen texts it was the focus of assessment nine times (see Table 7.1), while summary with main idea and details was assessed five times, a written response to a multiple choice question selected from SSA-release items for practice accounted for one assessment, Author’s Purpose was assessed once, and synthesizing information using compare and contrast was assessed once. There were a total of sixteen assessments as one text, *White Wave*, included two assessments, one for inference and one for summary.

Table 7.1.

*Types of Inferences Assessed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inference using evidence from the text</th>
<th>Inference using evidence from the text and background knowledge</th>
<th>Inference based on GENRE and using evidence from the text</th>
<th>CHARACTER inference using evidence from the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Nandi</td>
<td>• Charles</td>
<td>• White Wave</td>
<td>• The Stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Just a Dream</td>
<td>• The Space Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>• High Rise Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Under the Rug</td>
<td>• Bad Day at Riverbend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inference using evidence from the text
Inference using evidence from the text and background knowledge
Inference based on GENRE and using evidence from the text
CHARACTER inference using evidence from the text
Sixteen Assessments, Five Skills, One Formula

The assessments were, in all sixteen cases, responses written in the students’ reading response journals. Each of these written responses followed a specific format prescribed by the language structures. As I discussed earlier, the data being reported in the ‘data-driven planning meetings were numbers of P’s, PP’s and U’s, based on weekly assessments that the teachers then used to group children into proficiency categories. All sixteen assessments conformed to one identical format, meaning there was only one type of assessment, which, as this chapter will illustrate, was not clearly formative or summative, nor did the results clearly inform instruction. Thus, students’ memberships in the hierarchy of categories were contingent on mastery of only five skills that they had only one way to demonstrate.

What is a language structure? The language structures were, as the name suggests, fill-in-the-blank templates that structured the students’ responses to texts. [See Appendix B for the language structures provided for each of the sixteen assessments.] Importantly, a language structure was provided every day and for every skill as well for the written responses students completed for their scored assessments at the end of every text. So, the language structure was a tool connected to the formal assessments the teachers used to generate data. However, the language structures also scripted the students’ responses during informal talk. For example, when the students were given a “turn & talk” prompt during whole group instruction, they responded in their “turn & talk”—the verbal response they shared with a classmate sitting close to them—using a scripted, fill-in-the-blank structure. For example, if Norah asked the students to make an inference about the main character in a text the students would then tell a classmate sitting close to them their inference using the sentence frame, “I infer that the character is __________. My evidence is __________. My evidence supports my inference because________________.”
Where do the language structures come from? The language structures were introduced to the teachers through a district-organized professional development and examples were subsequently provided by Emma, the literacy coach during a planning meeting (see Appendix C for the Examples of Sentence Frames provided by Emma). Drawing on their professional development training and using the examples provided by Emma, the teachers spent copious amount of time during their planning meetings brainstorming, writing, revising or simply talking about the actual language structures.

Well-documented research on reading comprehension identifies the behaviors of good readers. Pre-eminent reading scholars Duke & Pearson (2011) provide a list of practices good readers use as well as an extensive discussion of how to teach young readers to develop those skills, strategies and behaviors. This approach must, they explain, be balanced, writing, “good comprehension instruction includes both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a great deal of time and opportunity for actual reading, writing and discussion of text” (p. 207). Additionally, a key feature of a robust model of reading comprehension instruction would, they argue, include the gradual release of scaffolds following explicit instruction and guided practice of strategies.

The language structures could have been the tools of explicit instruction or guided practice; however, they were included for every single day of instruction for every single skill from the beginning to the end of data collection, which corresponded with the end of the school year. They were not tools made available through guided practice then gradually released over the course of six months, but were instead included in the instructional planning the same way week after week, text after text. In fact, as anxieties around the SSA grew closer, the language structures became increasingly prescriptive. Thus, rather than crafting and honing a tool for
instruction, the teachers used the language structure to create an expected response from an expected reader. This practice was tangled up with the reporting, leveraging, and generating data practices that were not only normative in the planning meetings, but required through the structure provided by the school-issued template.

**Using Data in a Data Review**

Language structures figured prominently in the teachers’ planning meetings and, thus, in the positioning of students around the idea of “proficiency” and in learning opportunities for students in the classrooms. To review findings on which this section builds, chapter 5 introduced the illusion of data-driven practices created by the school-provided template for planning. “Student data” were present in the meetings, but the quality of these data and the depth of thought with which they were used to inform teaching and learning were dubious. That chapter established that the larger goal for literacy was proficiency—and that goal was privileged more than instruction clearly and coherently informed by thoughtful review of student data.

As chapter 5 also introduced, the goal of proficiency and the structure of the meetings reified deficit perspectives. In response to the question, “How will we address misconceptions from the data review?” Norah, typically, included a brief explanation of how the information from the data review was informing instruction for the upcoming week. What was “learned” from the data review (in the five instances that something was documented as actually learned) was, however, typically a problem that was identified and then located in students. How the teachers planned to address the “misconceptions” they identified marked the point in the meetings when the teachers shifted focus from the students to the organization of learning in their classrooms. Thus, the identification of students’ struggles was an important transition in the organization of the meeting. The role of the language structure was connected to these
discussions as they were often identified as the reason students were or were not improving or the language structures were leveraged as the tools that would “fix” the problems.

**Strategies for Addressing Misconceptions**

There were six categories of documented ways the teachers planned to address misconceptions from the data review during planning meetings (See Table 7.2). Looking closely at these categories generates insight into the teachers’ interpretations of what constituted ‘data-driven planning’.

Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Teachers’ Strategies for “Addressing Misconceptions from Data Review”</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No plan for addressing misconceptions. Either there were no data reviewed or the point of misunderstanding was simply re-stated without providing an indication of how it would be addressed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model and/or show exemplar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text selection. Both instances of text selection also included other concomitant supports 1) practice and 2) language structure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Structure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold students accountable and give feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First and foremost, a critical finding is that in seven instances there was no documented plan for addressing student misconceptions. Norah’s interpretation of the planning meetings—particularly in terms of their value as a support structure—was that they were ‘data-driven’. However, my data on planning meetings reveal that in seven of fifteen instances information from the review was not leveraged for instructional planning. Nonetheless, the remaining eight weeks capture a picture of the tools and strategies implemented by the teachers in order to enact data-driven planning for achieving proficiency.

**Ubiquity of the Language Structure**

Three of the eight weeks included plans for showing the students model or exemplar responses. Each of these model responses followed the language structure provided for the
assessed skill (see Appendix B). In two instances, the teachers planned to revise the language structure to remediate the point of misunderstanding. Twice the students were given opportunities to “practice”; however, in both of these instances the students were also given a language structure to follow. In other words, an opportunity to practice the skill actually manifested as an opportunity to practice filling in the language structure created for that skill. Lastly, students were, on one occasion, held accountable and given feedback. The feedback was provided on responses the students completed using a language structure. In other words, though the teachers only explicitly identified the language structure as the central tool of focus twice, in eight of the ten instances when the teachers developed a strategy for supporting the students, these strategies invariably included the language structure as a central tool.

Planning, Teaching, Enacting, Reflecting

After spending extensive time with curricular and instructional data including agendas, planning meeting fieldnotes, transcripts and Promethean Board flip charts, I was able to develop insights into how the teachers were operating in their school context and how school-provided tools, district-mandated curricula, and state-administered tests were influencing their pedagogical choices. However, I knew it was critical to look across student data, as well, to bring the students into clearer focus and to really understand how the climate of literacy played out for the children.

I decided to look at each planning agenda and the students’ reading response journals to determine the relationship between the “data” reported from the students’ written assessments and the reading skills and strategies the teachers decided to teach as foci of instruction. What was the cycle of planning, teaching, enacting, reflecting that was happening in Norah’s classroom? How were the students’ responses informing the conversations in the planning meetings?

Seven Threads
I started with the first completed agenda and followed, in chronological order: first, a conversation from the plans for instruction; second, the focus of the assessment included on each set of those plans; third, the students’ responses to that assessment; fourth, the data report that followed during the subsequent planning meeting and the strategies the teachers identified in order to support the students based on that report of “data”. In doing this, I found seven separate ‘conversation threads’ across the fifteen agendas. A thread of a conversation ended when the data for an assessment were never reviewed.

The threads were useful for seeing how “data” were (and were not) informing instruction from one meeting to the next. But, they also provided a key understanding of why reading instruction was not the data-driven practice Norah believed it was. My analysis revealed that the data were informing assessment more than instruction. The student data reviewed each meeting were derived from a previous assessment. However, the planning that followed the review of student data included teaching a range of skills, but assessing only the skill taught on the last day spent on each text. Assessments were planned for every text and were administered on the last day of reading. And, regardless of how many skills were taught in association with a given text, the focus of assessment was always the skill taught on the last day of reading. Thus, multiple skills were taught in association with each text, but only one skill was assessed per text and, often times the same skill was assessed over and over across multiple texts. The distinction between whether or not the assessments were intended to be formative or summative was blurred. What is clear is that while 24 skills and strategies were taught over the course of data collection, only five skills were actually assessed—the result was that the ‘data-driven’ planning was both limited to and limited a conceptualization of proficiency that included the students’
ability to demonstrate mastery of a very small skill set—infrence, summary, identifying an author’s purpose, and comparing/contrasting.

To bring this picture into clearer focus, it is important to understand how the teachers were using data to support the students to accomplish the task of becoming proficient readers, as defined by their ability to infer, summarize, identify an author’s purpose, compare/contrast and respond to a sample multiple choice question from the SSA. Below, I trace an example of one of these conversation threads to make the relationship between data, assessment, and instructional planning visible.

**Thread 1.** The first thread started with the first agenda, dated November 3rd, for *The Stranger*. Questioning and inference were the skills taught in association with *The Stranger*. Inference was the assessed skill. Two weeks later, on November 17th, Norah and her team teachers reviewed the data from this assessment. The teachers’ expressed their concerns about the results of this assessment:

Kids aren’t seeing trends through all the pieces of evidence. Synthesizing the evidence. They aren’t use [sic] to taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference.

Thus, the teachers decided to “address misconceptions from the data review” by selecting the text, *Charles*, for a three-day cycle of instruction. The notes on the agenda stated the “higher level text from the Junior Great Book Series will give them time to practice”.

Of interest, however, the skills then taught in association with *Charles* were prediction on the first day, wondering (known also as questioning) on the second, then inference on the third and last day. Again, inference was the skill assessed. The teachers used the data from *The Stranger* to determine the students did not synthesize evidence when they wrote their responses
to the inference assessment. The skills they decided to teach in association with the text, Charles, were prediction and wondering. On the last day, the day they assessed the students, they planned for inference.

Three weeks later, on December 8th, the teachers shared their data from Charles. Instead of “addressing students’ misconceptions” on the school-provided template, the teachers indicated that the students’ responses on this inference assessment were an improvement over the previous inference assessment. They attributed this improvement to the language structure. Within the first two minutes of the meeting, immediately following the data report, Norah stated:

Um, I did notice with the language structure with the quote they did better. After I showed them how to use a specific quote from the text and then explain that quote they did much better.

The phrase, “they did much better” in Norah’s statement was key, as it suggested that the students showed signs of learning and improvement. The question, ‘They did better than what?’, can be answered by returning to the misconception documented in the previous agenda. The teachers wrote,

Kids aren’t seeing trends through all the pieces of evidence. Synthesizing the evidence. They aren’t use [sic] to taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference.

When Norah indicated “they did better”, it could be assumed that the students did better “seeing trends through all pieces of evidence,” better “synthesizing evidence,” and better “taking clues from the text and connecting them to find a commonality to make an inference”.

The means by which Norah and her team of teachers intended to address this ‘misunderstanding’ was by selecting a “higher level text”, Charles. In the subsequent discussion
of student data related to *Charles*, the students’ success, however, was attributed to the language structure, not the level or quality of the selected text. Norah initially identified the “language structure with the quote” as the means by which the students “did better”. When she continued her explanation, she shifted the focus from the language structure to “showing them how to use” the language structure. Her words suggest there was a way, a method, for using the language structure and she showed it to her students, which helped them “do better”.

There were three language structures included on the planning agenda and Promethean Board flip charts for *Charles*, one for each day of instruction. On day one, when the focal skill was prediction, the language structure read, “I predict that_____ because______.” On day two, when the focal skill was questioning the language structure read, “I wonder why (____character or event____)?” On the third day, the language structure read, “I infer __________. My evidence is __________. I know __________.” On the third day there was also a question, “Why do you think none of the other parents have mentioned Charles?” and an example response that is provided below.

In [sic] infer that Charles doesn’t exist. My evidence is that when Charles had to stay late Laurie was also late coming home. No one mentioned Charles at the PTA meeting and that Laurie’s teacher said, “We don’t have a Charles in kindergarten.” I know that kids lie when they are in trouble and this shows that Laurie could be lying about who is getting in trouble.

Importantly, the example response followed the language structure, “I infer __________. My evidence is __________. I know __________” providing the students with a model response. However, it did not answer the question, “Why do you think none of the other parents have mentioned Charles?” The model response that was presented to the students adhered to the fill-
in-the-blank language structure, but it was ultimately disconnected from the question that was posed to the students, asking them to draw meaning from the text.

Furthermore, returning to Norah’s earlier statement, “after I showed them how to use a specific quote from the text and then explain that quote they did much better,” the relationship between using the language structure to synthesize evidence and generate inferences and using the language structure as a fill-in-the-blank template was complicated by the fact that her example did not actually answer the question specific to why parents do not mention Charles. It demonstrated how to successfully fill in the blanks. It did not demonstrate how the language frame provided readers with a tool to craft responses that demonstrate meaning making. Indeed, students would have to infer that the inference in the model response related to why parents did not mention Charles.

Looking across the students’ responses, they, in most instances, followed the language structure exactly. One student, John, followed the language structure, but still received a score of U. His response (see Figure 7.2) read

Infer he got a but spanken. My evidence is she will but spanken I know what because he lied to his parents.

Just above the U score, Norah wrote a note, “Does this explain anything about Charles”? This ‘unsatisfactory’ response is interesting because John followed the “I infer __________. My evidence is __________. I know __________” formula. And while the response was incomplete and not reflective of a proficient fifth grade response, his inference, in response to the question, “Why do you think none of the other parents have mentioned Charles?” was that Charles received a butt spanking because he lied to his parents. John’s response was, indeed, an inference. And he followed the format of the language structure for an inference. However, he
received a score of U and a note asking if his response explained anything about Charles. There was an absence or lack of substantive feedback that might have helped John write an improved response. The fill-in-the-blank nature of the language structure was not helping him to generate a proficient inference. Moreover, his inference did explain something about Charles—that Charles was, likely, spanked for lying—thus the question that was included as qualitative feedback to substantiate the score of U functioned more to confuse than clarify.

Figure 7.2

*Student writing sample: John*

Following in the same vein, many students who followed the language structure also received a PP. In these examples, Norah’s feedback suggested the students were not providing enough detail or not clearly connecting how the details they provided actually supported their evidence. However, the language structure—“I infer __________. My evidence is __________. I know __________”—prompted the students to fill in the blanks. The blanks could be “filled in” as if the act of filling in the blank was the task, without any understanding about 1) the level of detail that was expected, 2) how to make connections between the sentences in the frame to
demonstrate synthesis, or 3). how the language structure was connected to reading comprehension practices. It was unclear how, without specific feedback and support, the fifth graders were meant to use the tools being made available to crack the code of proficiency.

For example, Annie (see Figure 7.3) wrote

I infer that no one mentioned Charles at the P.D.A. meeting because I think that Charles is just fake it would be Laurie I think Laurie is just making up Charles so he not be in trouble. My evidence is that Laurie would keep talking about Charles because why would he keep talking about him everyday. I know that Charles be is bad and then nice and becomes bad again.

Figure 7.3
Student Writing Sample: Annie

Are there any other details that support your inference?
The feedback Norah provided asked Annie, “Are there any other details that support your inference?” The language structure, however, included only one blank for supporting evidence. So, while Annie completed the language structure, which was the tool she was provided, she did not provide the level of detail Norah expected of a proficient response. Filling in the blanks earned her only a partially-proficient score. Norah seemed to recognize that the language structure was not supporting the students to write the detailed, nuanced responses that signaled proficiency since the students, even when they filled in the blanks precisely, were not giving her the responses she was looking for. However, the language structures were mainstays throughout the school year provided to the students each week to complete their response to reading assessments.

It is also unclear how the “data” showed that the students were better synthesizers of textual evidence when they used the language structure with quotes in response to the Charles text. The following exchange occurred between the teachers and Emma as Norah documented her insight that the students did much better “with the language structure with the quote”. This exchange reveals the belief that was hidden underneath the proclamation that the students “did better”.

Norah: (as she is typing) When students are using specific quotes from the text they are improving their response? Can I say that?

Jamie: Yes

Emma: mhm

Norah: Or their scores are better

Whether or not the students learned how to synthesize evidence was, perhaps, less important than the students scores’ increasing. Norah, initially, wrote that the students improved their responses.
She provided written documentation of the points she made, with conviction, at the beginning of the meeting. However, after actually typing the words into the template, Norah appeared unsure of this claim and asked for permission, seeking agreement from her colleagues. She answered her own question in the slot she created when she asked, “Can I say that,” by adding, “Or their scores are better”. While she did not change the response on the template and noted simply that the students’ responses improved with the revised language structure, her question suggests she understood “an improvement of scores” as an important goal thus wondered if this should be the specific achievement noted on the template that would be submitted to the principal.

Norah believed that the language structure helped more students earn P’s, but her talk suggested that improved responses and improved scores were not necessarily in direct relationship with each other. The children’s scores—their P’s, PP’s and U’s were the most important indicators of success—even while these scores may not have represented actual growth. The language structure provided the template; the students completed the template, which indicated they were “doing better”.

Also on December 8th, after the teachers shared their data from Charles, the team planned instruction for the text *Won’t Take No for an Answer*. They planned to teach three skills: using context clues to decipher the meaning of unknown words, character inference, and summary. Summary was the focus of assessment. All three foci of instruction were selected because of their high point values on the SSA. The conclusion drawn from the data reported at the beginning of this meeting was that students did better. So, instead of addressing “misconceptions” the teachers selected three foci of instruction that Emma, the literacy coach, indicated were important because they would be tested on the SSA. Her suggestions were made on December 8th. The SSA was scheduled to be administered in March.
Context Clues. After the teachers decided where to stop for each day they were reading *Won’t Take No for an Answer*, they each suggested vocabulary words from the story. In a discussion of vocabulary, Blake suggested that the teachers focus instruction on “using context clues”, sharing examples from his classroom of instances when his students encountered unknown words and struggled to decipher their meaning. In response, Emma stated,

Emma: And I was looking through the radar graphs and vocab is twenty points.

Blake: Yeah

Emma: It’s a huge—I think it’s one of the most.

Blake: Yeah. I feel like that was like last year too.

The team decided to include word inference as the teaching point to which Blake later responded, “And especially now that we’re entering third quarter,” suggesting that the proximity to the state test made vocabulary all that much more important to teach because it was a skill connected to twenty SSA points.

Character inference. When Norah shared that she would like to focus on Bessie Coleman’s character, the suggestion to teach the skill character inference was accepted because this skill was also high SSA point-value.

Norah: Like, there’s already clues that Bessie is determined

Blake: Sure. Do you wanna work on character inference

Emma: character traits, or

Norah: k

Emma: character inference. I think inference is important ‘cause I think that was another one
Jamie: How many points is that?

Emma: That one, you know what, I didn’t write that one down, I kinda glanced really quick before I came in here. Let me look. I know it’s huge in 3rd grade…I think it’s under, they don’t have a specific one that’s inferring, but they have making predictions and drawing conclusions from text and various genre and that’s twenty points.

Norah: ok

After the team talked, briefly, about the SSA Emma shared

Emma: I’ll go through this later and kinda highlight. And I’ll just bring it with when I plan

Norah: ok

Emma: from now on, so you can kinda focus on those things.

At the outset of the meeting, the teachers shared “student data” from the Charles assessment. However, the planning for instruction that followed was not driven by “data”, rather, teaching objectives were very clearly selected because these were the skills and strategies that were most important on the SSA. Emma, the representative of the district, operates in the meeting to weave the SSA throughout the conversation, bringing suggestions and ideas back to the goal of test-prep that the proverbial “they” dictated. This role was not unique to this meeting on December 8th, as Emma shared that she would bring the radar graph to future planning sessions (which she did), so the teachers could “focus on those things”, with those things clearly indicating the skills with the most point value on the SSA.
Summary. Norah, who was the designated note taker for each planning meeting, asked her colleagues numerous times throughout the meeting what the teaching point would be for “day 4”. The teachers divided the text up over four days, identifying daily stopping points. Then, they went back and selected the objectives for each day. Once the team selected the teaching objectives, they wrote or revised the language structures corresponding to those objectives. During this meeting, Norah prompted Jamie, Blake, and Emma a few times before the following conversation unfolded.

Norah: What are we doing day 4? We gotta figure that out.

Emma: So, let me tell—main idea’s a big one

Norah: Yeah

Emma: Main idea’s 20 points. Um summary’s 16 points.

Norah: Last year we said, ‘The title of this book is Won’t Take No for an Answer. Find two details in the book that show how Bessie wouldn’t take no for an answer.’ That’s what we did last year.

Emma: So, kinda main idea and details.

Norah: mhm

Jamie: Can they do a summary with the frame? I mean I’ve got a couple of non-fiction frames.

Norah: Ok. So, do we wanna do summary?

Blake: I haven’t done any summary.

Norah: I haven’t done any in awhile.

Jamie: I haven’t done any non-fiction summaries.

The summary was selected as the assessment because it was a high SSA point-value skill for
which the teachers had ready-made language structures. The students’ struggles and successes, as determined by reviewing data, were not included in a discussion of what to teach and what to assess when planning the *Won’t Take No for an Answer* text. Of interest, the text was not also not included in a discussion of what to teach and what to assess. **The central construct around which all planning was organized was the test.**

The data from the *Won’t Take No for an Answer* assessment were then reported on January 5th. However, the data from the district-interim exams were also returned that day. Those scores trumped the data from the students’ *Won’t Take No for an Answer* summaries during this meeting and, so, the interim score report was used to inform planning for the next text, *Women of the American Revolution*. Emma suggested, “I’m thinking from now until CSAP maybe focusing on what they’re really weak on when you do the strategies.” Thus, the teachers decided to focus on the five skills and strategies for which the children scored lowest on the interims: figurative language, prediction, theme, inference, and summary with main idea and details. Summary was the skill assessed, again.

Two weeks later, on January 19th, the data from the students’ *Women of the American Revolution* summaries were reviewed. On this day, the teachers discerned:

There is a group of kids who are missing the main idea (either too general or over generalized). There was also a group of kids who were missing the most important details.

To address this misunderstanding, the teachers decided to show the students examples of a Proficient response and an Unsatisfactory response and discuss the differences between them. They chose the text *White Wave* and planned to teach genre predictions and questioning/inference. They assessed inference on the day the students finished the text. The
following day they planned for another assessment—a summary. However, the team never reviewed the data from either assessment; thus, those assessments never informed next steps of instruction.

**Illiteracy**

When seven different threads can be traced across the planning and teaching of fifteen texts, this provides further evidence that ‘data-driven’ instruction was an illusion. There is a not a common thread, a thread that, perhaps, draws from a clear conceptual framework, that can be followed throughout the planning. Instead there are many threads. Many stops and starts left the data from five of the sixteen assessments un-reviewed, thus these data were not informing instructional planning. Test-prep was very obviously informing instructional planning. Of importance, however, when each thread of conversation was dissected, the teachers’ pursuit of increased numbers of Proficient scores, regardless of what this might reflect about learning, was highly visible. Also highly visible, were the consequences of privileging score reports more than learning.

The language structures created discrete fill-in-the-blank tasks. And, while filling in a sentence frame may give student work *the appearance* of reading comprehension, what it really represents is a student’s ability to fill in a sentence frame. The language structures were ubiquitous—teachers spent extensive time during planning meetings writing and revising the language structures, while children were asked to follow the script the language structures provided both when they talked and wrote about texts. Following the script in particular ways meant performing as a proficient reader. However, as the examples of John’s and Annie’s work above illustrate, children might follow the script and their very apparent understandings could be trumped by response to perceived misunderstandings.
Following the script of the language structure also meant practicing a highly reductive form of literacy. Although this reductive literacy is a serious consequence for students whose classroom gets appropriated as a test-prep factory, an additional alarming consequence is that the students did not even learn to be proficient test takers. During an interview at the end of the school year, Norah mentioned that the students relied too heavily on the language structures and suggested a more balanced approach would have been more effective. The excerpt of our conversation is below.

Norah: We had lots of professional development like with the language structures and stuff and I do think that those are supportive. I wonder at what point they need to be taken away ‘cause I do think that the kids rely on them too much

Andrea: mmmm

Norah: Like when I gave [the last text] I didn’t make a flip chart for it and I just gave them the question and they were like, ‘Where’s our language structure’?

Andrea: Right

Norah: [laughs] and so I do think that it’s, there’s definitely a balance (.) with using ‘em

Norah’s observation “I do think that it’s, there’s definitely a balance” maps directly to Duke & Pearson’s suggestions about a balanced approach to reading comprehension instruction that creates opportunities for guided practice while gradually releasing scaffolds so that students’ participation as readers shifts toward independence. However, her observation that the students were unsure how to respond to text without the literal test frame in front of them was made in the
last few hours of the school year. It was too late in this school year to use this point of reflection to revise classroom practice.

The language structures were instrumental, shaping teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom in profound ways. They foreclosed opportunities for the kinds of rich engagement with text that would both facilitate learning in all aspects of the Four Resources model and provide rich, multi-faceted, strength-driven “data” on which to plan instruction. Instead, the language structures were a district-provided tool that socialized teachers into their role as test preppers and students into their role as test takers.
For the six months I was an observer and peripheral participant in Norah’s classroom, I watched, documented and ruminated on the moments of acquiescence and resistance that unfolded. I watched a young teacher who so genuinely wanted to create opportunities for her students to have the access to special books that she was denied throughout her own elementary school experience. A teacher who knew those important experiences had to be, literally, created because, in her view, the texts the school district presented in their mandated reading program hindered her students’ deep learning and enthusiastic engagement. To my dismay, I also watched Norah unwittingly diminish her own efforts toward richer instruction as the State Standardized Assessment insidiously crept in to all aspects of her classroom practice. As my data suggest, the test straight-jacketed Norah. And I, throughout data collection and analysis—including, in particular, the authoring of the dissertation—experienced a palpable tension as my teacher and researcher selves pulled at one another: How could I engage in critical classroom-based research that I believed was so important for shining a spotlight on the inequitable dimensions of schooling without casting a blanket of doubt over teachers’ competences or students’ academic potential?

I weave the answer to that question throughout this chapter as I re-visit the claims I presented earlier and discuss the implications of my work for literacy teaching, learning, policy and research. While I indeed experienced moments of tension throughout my study, I found problem-solving devices in the analytic toolkit made available by my theoretical framework. Specifically, I identify instances that Cultural/Historical Activity Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis supported me to study Norah’s classroom as part and parcel of the school and district
ecology. I engaged critical lenses in order to focus on the systems of which Norah was a part and construct a complex narrative that implicates, pointedly, the state test as the mediating factor most influential in shaping classroom instruction that positions children as liabilities.

Reading instruction in Norah’s classroom was anchored to the state test, tethered by a range of school and district tools that were infused with the rhetoric of “data” and “proficiency”. I discuss the consequences of teaching and learning so tied to the high stakes of the tests—consequences for Norah’s pedagogy and the students’ opportunities for learning and growth. Lastly, I look ahead to the future, envisioning a research agenda that is hopeful, but committed to confronting inequity through work that contributes to studies of literacy, policy and teacher education.

Constructing Complex Narratives through Qualitative Classroom-Based Research

In the current sociopolitical context of school reform, teacher and student accountability is measured by children’s test scores. My study suggests that proficiency on a state exam was central to the very purpose of teaching and learning reading at Lazarus Elementary School. This goal of proficiency was both ideologically and legislatively determined. In 2010, the year before I commenced data collection in Norah’s classroom, the state senate passed a teacher accountability reform bill to evaluate teachers’ and principals’ performance based on student academic growth. However, any person who has spent time in elementary school classrooms knows that the teaching, learning, and growing experiences that happen between the human beings in those spaces each day, in small, moment-to-moment interactions, cannot be distilled down to singular, categorical scores that ultimately determine everyone’s fate. So, we resist indoctrination. Norah resisted by throwing out the packaged Mondo program any given week in exchange for rich literature written by talented children’s book authors. And, I, a former teacher
and now classroom-based researcher, resisted by designing a classroom study intended to highlight the problematic model of teaching that can sometimes occur with the adoption of commercial reading programs. But, resist as we may, the accountability is high-stakes. And, it is real. And, the moments when that reality manifests itself can be emotional.

That day in February, described earlier, when Norah was visibly flustered and expressed feelings of “stress” during the SSA score prediction activity was a pivotal moment on my trajectory that pushed my thinking about what, exactly, I was trying to accomplish through this dissertation project and beyond. I was literally and figuratively holding Norah, her colleagues, and students at a distance, watching classroom life happen on the other side of a metaphorical wall constructed by a laptop computer, audio and video recording devices, interview protocols and myriad analytical tools that shielded me from total immersion in the lived experiences of teaching and learning in Norah’s classroom. I had been critical of the school’s emphasis on test scores and hopeful about Norah’s negotiation of Mondo. But, on that day in February, I recognized how profoundly complicated it can be for teachers to scoff at the demands districts place on them, because those demands are also placed, perhaps with greater consequence, on their students. I wanted to offer a portrayal of Norah’s experience that captured that complexity.

Simplified storylines are ubiquitous, portraying teachers as one-dimensional characters. Whether they are sold as white knights saving brown and black children from the ‘perils’ of urban neighborhoods, docile women incapable of academic and intellectual rigor, unionized workers who enjoy a lifetime of summer vacations, or any of the other common storylines narrated about teachers, the portrayal is often simplistic. I wanted this story of Norah (and, indirectly, her contemporary counterparts facing the same dilemmas and challenges created by
the testing regime) to capture the complexity of their experience, but also be clear and accessible enough to offer a powerful counter-narrative to a singular storyline.

The struggle in this experience did not lie, solely, with Norah. During the processes of coding and analysis, I was often frustrated by the tensions that emerged as I wrote a dissertation that shared evidence that suggested opportunities for learning were compromised in this classroom. I coded data to unearth the conceptualization of proficiency at work and found constrained literacy learning. I coded data to identify the practices and behaviors enacted by Norah and found test-prep pedagogy. And that was hard, as I worried about how easy it would have been to detach the data from the human experiences of teaching and learning and present a picture of incompetency and low academic achievement. The theories framing this work afforded me the analytical tools to work through those points of struggle. I aimed to trace the social history of Norah’s instructional choices to their source, to illustrate the power and prevalence of the factors influencing her decisions and depict a teacher who knew resistance was necessary, even if the larger context challenged her and rendered her resistance futile.

**Social Organization of Learning & the Affordances of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory**

The lenses afforded by my theoretical framework enabled me to consider not only what was happening in Norah’s classroom—which, unfortunately, my data revealed was a reductive, competency-based approach to reading instruction—but how and why the entire system of activity shaped the version of literacy teaching and learning I observed. The lenses did not, necessarily, offer a quick fix and accounting for the classroom, school, and district activity systems certainly presented analytic challenges. However, they did, importantly, enable me to shift the focus from Norah to the contexts of which she was a part and from ‘low-achieving’ students to the system that simultaneously reproduces the inequity it is working to eradicate. At
the same time, my study holds implications for how these lenses can be employed in classroom-based research. My framework served to guide my study and reveal in crucial ways how Norah’s practice was inextricably linked to the ideologies at work in the school and district contexts. The theoretical and methodological tools leveraged in this work provide examples of the possible questions and lines of inquiry that contribute to greater understandings of how teaching and learning are enabled or constrained by the material and ideational tools available in the current climate of schooling.

A framework that affords qualitative researchers the tools to empirically distribute responsibility for teaching and learning across activity is crucial. Particularly in a time when student learning is conflated with student test scores and teachers shoulder the lion’s share of a scope of responsibilities. Those responsibilities are defined by state and district officials, using means not only provided, but mandated by those same stakeholders and measured by tests that publishing companies purport advance an agenda of “accountability” in spite of the growing body of research that exposes their flaws as metrics for student learning and teacher efficacy. While the onus is so often placed on teachers, “accountability” is distributed across students, the range of tools they are and are not given to engage in processes of meaning making, the manufacturers and distributors of these tools whose economic gain is linked to their consumption and use, teachers, the tools they are required to use, the goals that are asked to meet, and the political institutions that write these requirements into law.

Contradictions in and between systems constrain possibilities. My work is one example of a classroom study that asks audiences to consider how all the moving parts do and do not work together. In shifting the focus away from teaching and onto learning, for instance, I was able to examine the reading skills that were taught in Norah’s classroom, turning an analytic lens
to the coordination of tools mediating learning goals. For example, the school-provided template
the teachers were required to use to plan literacy instruction invoked an emphasis on “data” that,
consequently, shifted the teachers’ attention to the categories of proficiency that matched the
state test. The illusion of ‘data-driven’ planning that emerged, as a result, functioned to conflate
the teaching of test-able skills in order to bump numbers of reported P’s, PP’s and U’s with
supporting students to learn the behaviors of good readers—particularly good readers whose
repertoires include the four roles: code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text critic. The
deficit perspectives invoked by the template’s language further undermined learning by teaching
skills where skills were the object of learning rather than teaching skills that would mediate
students’ opportunities to learn more robust literacy practices.

Additionally, examining the systems in relation to one another, I turned the lens away
from a myopic gaze at teachers and onto the socially constructed, culturally mediated contexts
within which they are working. For example, the template provided by the school functioned to
both construct a planning meeting organized around “data” and “proficiency” instead of learning
as well as monitor the teachers’ fidelity to Mondo texts. The district literacy coach’s attendance
in the planning meetings reinforced the focus on “proficiency” instantiated in the planning
template and contributed to the narrowing of the term’s definition, as she facilitated instructional
planning informed by SSA radar graphs and the scripted language structures.

**Affordances of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Mediation includes not only the material artifacts that shape and intervene in processes of
learning, but also ideologies, the belief systems within which those material tools are embedded.
The ideologies shaping literacy instruction at Lazarus Elementary School and in the Alba District
were hidden. Beliefs cannot be seen in the same way a book is visible or a teaching practice can
be documented. They can be revealed, however, through the analysis of language. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) allowed me insight into underlying beliefs about teachers and teaching, literacy and learning embedded in the interactions and documents that served as data for this study. Drawing on tools of CDA enabled me to see, empirically, that Norah’s efforts to push back on the Mondo curriculum she was required to use were rendered futile in the face of the district’s beliefs about the importance of the state test. The beliefs about the central importance of the high-stakes assessment were so powerful they teacher-proofed and child-proofed practices that on the surface appeared as resistance. This finding was disheartening, but, as I explain below, has implications for teachers, principals, coaches and professional developers.

The goal of CDA is to identify the structures, strategies or other properties of text and talk instrumental in maintaining and reproducing power and dominance (Fairclough, 1985; van Dijk, 1993). In other words, power is enacted discursively, not simply imposed from the top down. Rather, it is jointly produced, often subtly, through language use. CDA provides the tools to make the invisible visible, and the subtle more obvious. For this work, CDA pointed to the role of the SSA in determining what counted as teaching, learning and proficiency and why, when Norah pushed, something more powerful pushed back.

Nebulous boundaries: misrepresenting teaching & learning goals. For instance, my analyses revealed the school’s and district’s amorphous boundaries around expectations for Mondo compliance. From the first to the fifth year the program was adopted, the district softened its hard line on fidelity giving Norah the perception that she was able to negotiate some flexibility. The softening was implicit, however, as conveyed through professional development sessions that offered the teachers tools for using Mondo “for them”. Norah worked within this
space because she believed it was necessary. Emma acknowledged this space when she approved the fifth grade team’s non-Mondo text choices and foreshadowed the “teacher’s choice” texts being written into the district pacing guide for the following year. But, the boundaries were unclear. Neither Norah nor Emma could define the terms around which they were and were not “allowed” to exercise flexibility with Mondo. However, mining the data further and further to determine what was pushing back from the other direction—that if not the school and district, explicitly—was the discovery that it was the SSA. Anxiety about the state-test was all over the data, so commonplace it seemed to operate as taken-for-granted by both teachers and the district literacy coach.

As my study also shows, data-driven practices at Lazarus were more akin to monitoring labels of “proficiency”. Students were assigned static labels of proficiency and Norah frantically worked to child-proof her classroom, using sanctioned tools (the most salient example being the language structure) to produce more P’s and fewer PP’s and U’s. This production of “P’s” was the foremost goal because, in March, when the SSA was administered, she would wonder if she prepared them, both genuinely hoping the students had learned the skills they needed to be successful and fearing that she may not be able to demonstrate increased levels of “proficiency” in her classroom. Planning for instruction was, by December, a process of counting numbers of proficient students and subsequently selecting the skill of the week from an SSA radar-graph that would boost those numbers. Student success was determined by their ability to demonstrate mastery over a small skill set on a type of assessment that never changed, never provided any other point of entry into the practice of reading or drawing meaning from text. The assessments were, in fact, not about meaning making and, instead, were fill-in-the-blank exercises that socialized the children to respond to texts using one rote formula for talking and writing.
Indeed, my study provides evidence that using a tool for instruction “off the shelf”, without considering the theory of learning informing that tool and its potentially strategic use to achieve a specific object of learning, minimizes the tool. Instruction, for instance, looked the same whether Norah used a Mondo text or a Chris Van Allsburg picture book. It looked the same because all instruction was based on tools (the school provided a planning template, the district provided a radar graph of frequently tested skills and fill-in-the-blank sentence structures to assess each of those skills) designed in relation to the central goal of increasing proficiency on the state assessment. Thus, the theory of learning embedded in those documents—an autonomous literacy model that conceptualized literacy as a set of universal skills that can be imparted to students through rote practice—was enacted, regardless of text. Norah—whose conceptualization of literacy learning was characterized by participation in “deep” and “higher-level thinking” skills necessary for sustained success in literacy practices—knew she needed to supplement Mondo with engaging texts. The district knew teachers wanted to supplement Mondo as evidenced by the planned-for change to the pacing guide. But, it seemed less obvious that moving books around did little to meet the actual goal: test performance. Ultimately, the school- and district-provided tools thwarted opportunities for rich learning even as these tools did not appear to bolster scores on the measure that was actually driving teaching and learning within this system.

**Articulating a framework.** Districts and schools must be able to articulate a conceptual framework of literacy teaching and learning; a cohesive framework that offers parents, teachers, principals and coaches a clear understanding of how the tools and supports made available are working in concert to achieve an explicated learning goal. This involves an expansive learning goal mediated by skills rather than skills as the learning goal. For example, such a framework
could include a Four Resources Framework for literacy instruction that informs instructional design that supports students to develop a repertoire of ‘roles’ that prepare them for participation in the contemporary world.

Within the district’s articulated framework, data needs to be clearly defined if the idea of “data” is to function ambitiously, rather than reductively. The ubiquitous use of ‘data-driven planning’ needs to be both more expansively defined and better supported. There was so much mystery surrounding Norah’s day-to-day teaching life. Teachers should be able to ask: What are the expectations? Why are these the expectations? How will we be supported to meet these expectations? And the school and district should be able to answer. This conversation may have compelled the actors in this system to realize their goal was, actually, test preparation more than teaching and learning. Making this contradiction transparent may have supported the teachers, administrator and coach to make the changes that enabled them to craft a cohesive model of instruction, a cohesive model of instruction that is critical for equitable schooling. Further, an expansive theory of learning would necessarily push back on the assumptions that conflated learning with test scores.

**Children as Liabilities: Consequential Reproduction of Inequity**

Gee & Green (1998) emphasize the affordance of CDA to examine what is accomplished through language use. In context, words take on and are infused with meaning, regardless of how participants in interaction may view or articulate intention. In my study, the labels of proficiency assigned to the children were exemplars of this idea. To be a proficient, partially-proficient or unsatisfactory student in the context of Lazarus connoted something more than how a child performed on a weekly assessment. The high-stakes climate constructed by the ubiquity of SSA discourse constructed PP and U children as *liabilities*. 
In his cautionary tale about labeling and mis-labeling children in order to explain learning failures, McDermott (1993) admonishes categorical labels associated with the practices of formal education that assign value and meaning to students’ different rates and ways of learning. He writes, “we must give up our preoccupation with individual performance and examine instead the structure of resources and disappointments made available to people” (p.295). The frequency with which Norah and the other fifth grade teachers were solicited to sort and rank their students with the labels of proficiency defined by the state test points to the persistence of this issue. But, of greater importance than the persistence of this issue is that it has real consequences for the students who are labeled, then sorted into a group that stands on one side or the other of the (also socially constructed) “achievement gap” without regard for the structural, material and social factors that served as either resources or disappointments to place them there.

Most salient in this dissertation was the role the language structure played to both perpetuate labels and to deliver the most rudimentary iteration of competency-based literacy that instantiates an “operationalization of the ‘boot strap’ mentality that locates school struggles in individuals rather than in systemic issues such as poverty and institutionalized racism” (Dutro, 2010, p. 262). The language structures teacher-proofed instruction by functioning as a test-preparation device that was not only included in every single day of reading instruction, but was also the sole format for assessment. The language structures also functioned to child-proof the classroom by providing the single delivery-system for the set of discrete skills that students needed to “master.” Further, children’s understandings, even as demonstrated in this one tool, appeared to be inconsistently noticed and noted, even as this was their only way to earn a spot in the ranks of competent children.
Ochs (1986) defines language socialization as “interactional display (covert or overt) to a novice of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting…[T]hrough their participation in social interactions, children internalize and gain performance competence in these sociocultural defined contexts” (p. 2). Within a conceptualization of learning marked by shifts in participation, I argue both Norah and her students were socialized to participate in literacy as defined through the language structures. The design and use of that tool suggested there was one right answer, one right method for arriving at the answer and suggested that competent performance in literacy equaled repetition and rote memorization. Difference, then, was stamped out and interpretations that fell outside the narrow parameters of normative were seen as illegitimate.

It might be possible to argue that Norah’s classroom was an anomaly and, further, that indexing a call for action to systemic race and class inequities is exaggerated, as issues of race and class were not addressed explicitly by the teachers, coach or administrators. However, I contend that the ease with which tales from the field can be dismissed and systemic issues of race and class obscured contributes to the deep entrenchment of inequity. Indeed, given the ubiquity and nature of high-stakes accountability, the dilemmas Norah faced and the implications of those dilemmas for her students are not an anomaly. Although the issues I have discussed effect all students, they hold the greatest consequence for the students of color and students living in poverty, like those in Norah’s classroom, who have historically been marginalized by schools and other social institutions.

To this point, Stornaiulolo, Hull & Nelson (2009) write,

traditional assessments of reading and writing, while widely understood to be neutral measure of children’s skills, continue to reward those children who share the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the test-makers…as long as assessments continue to privilege one kind of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1974), schools in particular and the public in general will continue to understand literacy as an autonomous and value-neutral set of basic skills. (p. 385)
These authors emphasize the inextricable link between the traditional assessments that reward only a small group of children and the ways the skills privileged by NCLB and national policy drive classroom instruction. They recommend, as a partial solution, an alternative such as “offering multiple measures at various points in time that engage a variety of semiotic tools and participation structures.” (p. 386). These ongoing measures of growth support students’ development across time. Shifts in assessments would dramatically change the organization of classrooms like Norah’s as the object of learning would no longer be a score of P on a mass-printed decontextualized multiple choice test, but would instead consider where students are on a developmental trajectory.

However, the nature of the skills privileged by national standards appears to be unchanging as states across the country introduce newly adopted Common Core State Standards (CCCS). With this wide-scale adoption there is a surge in research around teachers’ interpretations and implementations of the CCCS and its relationship to classroom practice. By example, Richard Beach, in a paper presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the Literacy Research Association cautioned,

The CCSS can also be translated in a manner that results in a fragmented curriculum organized around addressing isolated standards as opposed to engaging students in a coherent, integrated, well-balanced, curriculum that builds increasingly sophisticated connections and understandings between units. For example, teachers may be told to list a specific “standard for the day,” on the board and then teach just to that standard, leading to standards-based grading where teachers check off that students have “achieved” a standard. (p. 4)

The competency-based view of literacy pervasive in Norah’s classroom, school and district were not idiosyncratic to those contexts. Both NCLB and the CCCS, which have only gained visibility and momentum since this 2011 talk, reify this conceptualization of literacy as a truncated set of
test-able skills. And this conceptualization of literacy has been instrumental in creating and maintaining an achievement gap that divides students along race and class lines (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Au & Tempel, 2012; Dutro, 2010; Dutro & Selland, 2012; McCarthey, 2008; Zacher, 2011). If the assessments are both high-stakes and narrow and schools and districts are organizing their support for teachers around increased performance on these assessments and teachers are pressured to leverage these tools and supports to meet the demands for increased performance, how can a gap in achievement shrink? It cannot. But, one possibility for change may lie in the pressure the system places on teachers.

Creating Opportunities for Reflection. Norah truly believed she was not teaching to the test. But, in my analysis, it became increasingly clear she was, indeed, engaged in a kind of test-prep pedagogy, which was, in part due to implicit and explicit pressures to increase numbers of students identified as proficient through their scores. As I have shown, this felt pressure was in part because all of the tools and supports provided by the district indexed an approach to teaching that was focused on test performance. In our final conversation, Norah recognized one of these supports, the language structure, as problematic remarking that she recognized, in reflecting on the year, “there’s definitely a balance”. What if opportunities for deliberate reflection had been created for Norah during the school year? Would she have recognized the need for balanced implementation of learning scaffolds and enacted this change? If opportunities for reflection were built into the job of teaching—as standard as collaborative planning or attendance at faculty meetings—would some of the anxieties have become clearer to Norah (and to the parties responsible for inciting these feelings)? If the pressure to teach to the SSA was visible to Norah, might she have had opportunities to revise her practice to support learning in different ways?
The emphasis on proficiency inscribed onto the school-provided template for planning led the teachers toward step-by-step procedural displays of reporting data and naming the isolated skills they would hit each day and away from reflective discussions about their practice. One can imagine a planning heuristic that invites teachers to establish shared learning goals and guides them through discussion of the skills and strategies that would support the students to achieve those goal. Gutierrez & Vossoughi (2011) write, “the fundamentally mediated nature of reflection can complicate the taken-for-granted split between theory and practice” (p. 104). There is always a theory of learning enacted, even if it is obscured. Mediated reflection can be a tool for illuminating the theory that may be concealed, seeing how it is operating and creating opportunities for change.

Creating support structures for the teachers to reflect on teaching and, importantly, learning may have created opportunities for them to engage in the analytical processes that expose the ways children are positioned by, for example, certain discourse patterns such as focusing on students’ “misconceptions” or organizing talk around “proficiency”. Making these patterns visible through mediated reflection is central for interrupting, resisting, and transforming those discourses that position children as liabilities. Even if incrementally, child by child, classroom by classroom, the systems in which teachers and children are enmeshed may begin to change. Pre-service teacher education could introduce practices of mediated reflection to foster a sensibility that is then both enacted and supported through district- and school-based structures and routines.

Future Research & Practice

In embarking on my study, I was initially interested in the packaged curriculum mandated by the district and, while I foresaw a connection between the district mandate and the state test, I
did not anticipate how powerfully the test would mediate day-to-day classroom life. High-stakes accountability emerged as a crucial point of understanding in my study as it was pervasive in Norah’s classroom, at Lazarus Elementary School and in the Alba District, indexing the growth and persistence of tests as measures of competence nationwide. As a community of researchers and teacher educators, we are charged with understanding, empirically, the complex relationship between curricular mandates, learning opportunities in literacy classrooms, and the ubiquity of standardized assessments. Teachers, texts and tests are woven together and operate in the deeply layered contexts of schools and classrooms where “data driven” and “collaborative” practices mask the reductive notions of learning beneath the surface. It is crucial to bring evidence of those entrenched practices to the surface so they can be disrupted, because in this context of high-stakes accountability the pressure placed on teachers to carry full responsibility for children’s singular test scores consequently positions those children as liabilities.

Although it is important to understand the consequences of how policies are interpreted and enacted, even in the face of committed and well-intentioned educators, it is also critical to share examples of teaching and learning that thrives in spite of constraints. Those stories need to be told and shared as models of hope and possibility.

I hope to continue working with teachers and students in K-12 schools and classrooms organized around deep collaborations that support critical, equity-minded, and ambitious literacy teaching and learning in high-poverty schools within and despite policy contexts that can function as constraints for teachers and children. My findings underscore the generative possibility in establishing collaborations with teachers and working side-by-side (Erickson, 1994/1995, 2006) to study research questions of mutual interest and contribute to research that
showcases classrooms that work well. I imagine that teachers like Norah and her colleagues would welcome such collaborations and the changes in practice that might result.

Indeed, my findings presented personal and professional challenges that helped me envision how I will take up my future classroom-based research. My goal was never to criticize teachers. My goal was to engage in critical work that enabled me to examine how power and privilege functioned in classrooms. Although I believe I was able to accomplish the latter, I worry that I also accomplished the former and want to ensure that teacher and student voices are central to revealing and analyzing the complexities of the activity systems—the challenges, constraints, hopes, and possibilities—of which they are necessarily a part.

Indeed, I do see opportunities for hope and possibility in the data I collected at Lazarus Elementary School. For example, I envision an immediate next step in extending the analysis will be to follow a thread focused on teacher learning in the planning meetings. Expertise was distributed across Norah, a novice teacher, Blake, a teacher whose personal interest in literacy enabled him to make important contributions through his breadth of knowledge of children’s literature and genuine enthusiasm for writing and reading, and Jamie, who in the last year of her career worried the team would “get in trouble” for not following Mondo, but trusted her colleagues enough to take the perceived risk. I am interested in how trust was established, expertise was shared and curricular and instructional risks were taken because I believe those insights lend support to professional development that is useful for teachers of varying levels of experience and content knowledge who engage in collaborative curricular and instructional activities in schools.

Lastly, I see the hope and possibility most clearly in my role as teacher educator. Through my relatively brief immersion in the one example of Norah’s classroom, I have derived
a new understanding of the challenges my university pre-service teachers face and how I can best support them to not only find success as teachers, but to chip away at the structures that create those challenges. The greatest affordance of this work is the opportunity to both study and teach learning and literacy with teachers, both novice and experienced. My hope is that I can continue to ask the questions that support teaching and learning even in the most constrained contexts, share, with my students, some of the answers I found through this study and work with them to discover answers I did not. This is my hope because the stakes are high. For, there are, perhaps, no greater stakes than those that frame children, and the categorical test scores they represent, as a teacher’s disadvantage, her liability.
REFERENCES


Beach, R. (2011). Analyzing how formalist, cognitive-processing, and literacy practices learning paradigms are shaping the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Literacy Research Association, Jacksonville, FL.


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APPENDIX A
Complete list of Data Sources

FIELDNOTES

- **40 Total Field Notes**
  - 27 field notes from classroom instruction (includes whole & small group reading instruction) from Oct/Nov 2011 through Mar 2012
  - 13 field notes from planning meetings Nov 2011 through April 2012

INTERVIEWS

- **17 Total Interviews**
  - 14 student interviews (One interview with the 14 students who consented/assented to participation in the study)
  - 2 Focal teacher interviews
  - 1 Literacy coach interview

AUDIODATA

- **45 Total Audio Files**
  - 11 audio recorded planning meetings
  - 14 audio recorded student interviews
  - 2 audio recorded teacher interviews
  - 1 audio recorded literacy coach interview
  - A total of 17 audio recordings of classroom instruction
    - 7 audio recordings of small and whole group classroom instruction collecting periodically during the fall/winter
    - 4 audio recordings of one whole class cycle of instruction (one book)
    - 3 audio recordings of one small group cycle of instruction (Green group)
    - 2 audio recordings of one small group cycle of instruction (Orange group)
    - 1 audio recording of small group instruction (Blue group)

VIDEODATA

- **9 Total Video Recordings of Classroom Instruction**
  - 4 video recordings of one whole class cycle of instruction (one book)
  - 3 video recordings of one small group cycle of instruction (Green group)
  - 2 video recordings of one small group cycle of instruction (Orange group)
APPENDIX A
Complete list of Data Sources (continued)

STUDENT WORK

• **14 photocopied reading response journals** (one journal for each participating student, approximately 15 - 20 entries per student)
• **Interim Assessment Scores** for 14 participating students
• Previous **CSAP Scores** for 14 participating students
• Photocopies of **teacher grade book**
• Photocopies of **teacher completed Mondo progress reports** for small/guided reading groups

CURRICULUM

• **15 “flip charts” for Promethean Board** (includes shared reading texts, highlighted vocabulary, language structures, writing prompts, etc. that are displayed during whole group instruction)
• **15 plans/agendas** for whole group/shared reading instruction
• **7 Mondo ‘blue sheets’ for Mondo stories** used during whole group/shared reading instruction
• **8 Mondo ‘blue sheets’ for Mondo stories** used during small group/guided reading instruction
• **2 Radar Graphs for Grade 5 CO Literacy Framework Standards**
• **Example language structures**
• **State/District Grade 5 Reading Pacing Guide** (and various other documents from school district website)

OTHER

• All e-mails (approximately 300) from August 2011 through April 2012
### APPENDIX B
Language Structures Provided for Each of the Sixteen Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Writing Prompt or Focus of Assessment</th>
<th>Corresponding Language Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Stranger</strong></td>
<td>Who do you think the stranger is? Give three pieces of evidence to support your inference.</td>
<td>I infer that the character is __________. My evidence is __________. My evidence supports my inference because __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In And Around the Pacific Rim</strong></td>
<td>Multiple Choice/SSA-Released Item</td>
<td>“I think the answer is __________. My evidence from the text is __________. My evidence supports my answer because __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charles</strong></td>
<td>Why do you think none of the other parents have mentioned Charles?</td>
<td>I infer __________. My evidence is __________. I know __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Legend of Nandi</strong></td>
<td>Why did Nandi agree to be called the Spider Women [sic]?</td>
<td>I noticed in the text it said, “____<strong>,” this proves ________<strong>. It also said, “</strong></strong>__.” This proves __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Won’t Take No for an Answer! The Story of Aviation Pioneer Bessie Coleman</strong></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>The main idea of __________ is __________. The most important details are __________. Another important detail is __________. Also, __________. Lastly, __________. The author wants me to lean [sic] __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Just a Dream</strong></td>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>I infer that it is the past/future because <strong><strong><strong><strong><strong>. In the text it said, “</strong></strong></strong></strong></strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women of the American Revolution: “Sybil Ludington”</strong></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>The main idea of __________ is __________. First, __________. Then, __________. Finally, __________. The author’s theme is __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Space Program</strong></td>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>I think __________ is __________ because in the text it said “__________.” This piece of evidence is important because in my background knowledge I know __________.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| White Wave, Chinese Folktale  | Inference                      | What does the last line of the text mean? | I think the author is trying to teach us _______ because in the text it said “_____________” and it connects to the genre by _______.
|                               |                                |                                    |                                                                                                                                         |
| White Wave, Chinese Folktale  | Summary                        |                                    | The main idea of _____ is _________. First, __________. Then, __________. Finally, _________. The author’s theme is _________.               |
| The Hitchhiker                | Summary                        |                                    | Check flip chart & student samples                                                                                                     |
| Water Wonders of the World    | Author’s Purpose               |                                    | I think the author is teaching us _______ because _______. In the text it said “_____________”.                                          |
| America’s Mountains           | Synthesizing Evidence using    |                                    | By comparing ________, ________, and ________ the author is trying to lead me to the understanding that/of ________.                      |
|                               | Compare and Contrast           |                                    |                                                                                                                                         |
| Bad Day at Riverbend          | Inference                      |                                    | * flowchart (check student samples)                                                                                                   |
| Rescue Missions: “High Rise Rescue” | Character Inference         |                                    | I think the answer is _______ because in the text it said “________”.                                                                 |
| Under the Rug                 | How does the idiom connect to the ending? |                                    | I infer _______ because in the text it said “________” and the idiom ________ connects to this because _______.                         |
APPENDIX C
Examples of Sentence Frames Provided by District Literacy Coach

Examples of Sentence Structures

For Reading
Making Connections
• When I read _____ it made me think about ______. So this helps me understand/know__.
• ______reminds me of ______ because _______. So this makes me think__.

Making Predictions
• I think ___________ will ______ because _______.
• The _____ is/are going to _______.
• What I already know about __________ helps me predict that __________.
• Because __________, I predict that _______.

Asking Questions
• A question I have about ______ is ______ because _______.

Visualizing
• When I read ______, I pictured _______. This helped me understand____.
• When I saw/read__, I pictured___. So I think he/she is/will____.

Compare/Contrast
Characters
• ___is like____ because they both ____. On the other hand, the ____ is _____ and ____ is _____.
• ____ (action) but ____ (action).

Compare
• Both ______ and _______ have/are ________.
• The _______ is similar to the____ because both______________.

Contrast
• Some _____ are/have _______. But some ______ are/have ________.
• The __________ is different from the______ because one has ______ and the other doesn’t_______.

Character Traits
• ____ is (character) ______ because (trait) _____.

Character’s actions
• I predict that ____is going to/will____ because (in my experience) I know _______.
• I predict that__ is going to/will__ because in the text it said/I saw____.
Text Features
• Under the heading ______ I learned ______. This fact is important because ______.

Inferences
Inferences – general
• I think___ because in the text it said___.
• I think____because in my experience I know____.

Inferences – difficult meanings
• I infer the word ___means__ because I know___. (no context clues in text)
• I think the word ___means__ because earlier/later in the text it said___. (context clues in text)

Inferences about character feelings
• I think that _____ feels_____ because in the text it said______.
• I think that _____feels_____because (in my experience) I know______.

Inferences about character traits
• I think that _____is____ because in the text it said______.
• I think that _____is____because (in my experience) I know______.
• In the text it says___. So that makes me think he/she is______.
• (In my experience) I know that_____. So that makes me think he/she is______.
• An attribute/character trait that describes ___is ___. I know because in the text the character (what they said/did).

Inferences about character change (Cause/effect)
• In the beginning ______ was _____ because ______. (But) In the end ______ was ___ because ______.
• I think_____ led____ to ____ because in the text it said______.
• I think__ was/felt____ because__. But now ___is/feels___ because______.
• In the beginning ___ (action). But in the end he/she changed because he/she (action).

From Reading
Retell
• First__________, next__________, and then__________.
• In the beginning__. Next___. Then_____. In the end______.

Retell with Characters
• I know the characters are ________. In the beginning they ________ and then they ____. At the end they ________.
Cause and Effect
•  I think__ led __to __because in the text it said__and __.
•  The ______ had _______ so ____.
•  Due to the fact that ______, _____decided to ______.
•  If______ had/hadn't _______.________ would/wouldn’t have ______.

Drawing Conclusions
•  The ______ is ________ because________________
•  She/He feels ________ because ______.

Compare
•  Both _____ and _____ have/are ________.
•  The _______ is similar to the_____ because both__________________.

Contrast
•  Some _____ are/have ______. But some ______ are/have ________.
•  The ________ is different from the_____ because one has ______ and the
  other doesn't______.

Sequence of Events
•  We saw that first, ______, then, ______ and at the end, ____________.

Inference
•  I think _____ is ______because in the text it said ________.

Author’s Purpose
•  The author’s purpose is to persuade/teach/inform us that__ (action) which causes ___.
•  The author’s purpose is to persuade/teach/inform us that____. I know this because in the text it says ________.

Author’s Message
•  The author wants us to learn/know ______ because in the text it said__________.

Main Idea
•  I think the main idea of______ is ______. One detail from the text to support this
  is ______. Another detail is __________. A final detail is _______.
•  Fiction: The story _____ is about _____ who___. In the beginning ______ but in
  the end ________.
•  Non-fiction: (the frame would depend on the function of the text, but could start
  as...) The text___ is about ___. (frame here that elicits the function of the text)

Character Traits
•  _____is ______ because ______.
(character)  (trait)

Summarizing

Non-fiction section with compare/contrast
• The text ___ is about ___. Some ___ can/are/have ___. But some ___ can/are/have ___. Both ___ and ___ are/have/can ___.

General Non-Fiction
• The main idea about ___ and what/how ___. First, ___. Next ___. Also, ___. Finally ___.

General Fiction
• ___ is mostly about ___ who ___. In the beginning ___. In the middle ___. At the end ___.

Fiction with cause/effect or character change
• ___ is mostly about ___ who ___. In the beginning ______ was _____ because ______. (But) In the end ______ was _____ because ______.
• ___ is mostly about ___ who ___. I think ___ led ___ to ___ because in the text it said ___.
• The book is mostly about ____ who _____. In the beginning _________. In the middle _____ and in the end _______. (Use for K-2)