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Cogn Instr. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2009 September 1.

Published in final edited form as:
Cogn Instr. 2001 March 1; 19(1): 95–142. doi:10.1207/S1532690XCI1901_3.

Constructing Literacy in the Kindergarten: Task Structure, Collaboration, and Motivation

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Abstract

This ethnographic study explores kindergarten children's emergent motivation to read and write, its relation to their developing concepts of reading and writing (Guice & Johnston, 1994; Johnston, 1997; Turner, 1995), and to their teachers instructional goals and classroom norms. Teachers and students together constructed legitimate literate activity in their classrooms, and this construction framed the motivation of students who were at risk for developing learning disabilities in reading and writing. Specifically, the kinds of reading and writing activity that were sanctioned in each class and the role of student–student collaboration colored students' views of the purposes of literacy and their own ability to learn. Findings extend our understanding of how young children's literacy motivation influences, and is influenced by, their classroom literacy culture. Implications for early literacy instruction for children with learning disabilities, and for their continuing motivation to read and write, are discussed.

The purpose of this study was to explore children's emergent motivation to read and write and its relation to their developing sense of what reading and writing are (Guice & Johnston, 1994; Johnston, 1997; Turner, 1995). I examine how teachers and students together construct literate activity in their classrooms and how that construction frames the motivation of students who may be at risk for developing learning disabilities in reading and writing because of difficulties with the phonologic code, orthographic code, or both.[1]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literacy as Social Construction

I started from the assumption that kindergarten teachers and their students actively construct reading and writing in their classroom cultures through in structional tasks; talk about words; books, journals, and everyday print; and through the time allotted to various literacy-related activities in the school day (Erickson, 1996; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Turner, 1995). Reading and writing are a major focus of instruction in kindergarten, and literacy activities take up the majority of time in most classrooms. The kinds of literacy tasks children encounter "represent to students what literacy is, why it is important, and what it can do" (Turner, 1995, p. 415).

For some students, the kindergarten classroom will be where they have their most extended experiences with the written word, whereas others also read and write frequently with parents and family members (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). At this age, however, both home and

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[1]By "children at risk for developing learning disabilities," I refer to a group of children identified as low performing, relative to national norms, on assessments of phonemic and orthographic awareness. Increasing evidence points to the validity of early assessments of phonological and orthographic awareness in predicting later diagnoses of learning disability. See McCutchen et al. (in press) for a complete description of this position and a review of the evidence.

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school literacy activities are primarily social and take shape and importance from their social contexts. Reading and writing competence may be desirable for different reasons in different classrooms. Literacy skills may be valued because they help children communicate and receive information that is important to them, or they may be important because higher skills lead to more teacher praise or help students finish work more quickly and move on to more interesting activities.

Literacy activities also provide opportunities to explore values and social norms and to discuss what learning is of most worth (Nicholls, Patashnick, Cheung, Thorkildsen, & Lauer, 1989; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998). Children enter school with existing beliefs about reading and writing (Baker et al., 1997; Heath, 1982) and with conceptions of learning and effort that are likely to differ from their teachers' (Nicholls,1989). It is in the daily interactions of teacher and students—the struggles, frustrations, and small triumphs—that literacy is constructed in the classroom, and this interaction forms the context for this study.

Motivation to Read and Write

Historically, theories of achievement motivation have concerned generalized approaches to achievement tasks across domains. The same motivational constructs were employed to explain achievement behavior in domains as dissimilar as business, reading, or sport (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1989). Recently, motivation researchers have argued that these theories are too general and that to understand students' achievement behavior, it is necessary to study domain-specific motivation patterns (Bandura, 1994; Nicholls et al., 1989; Nolen & Haladyna, 1990; Wigfield, 1997). Even within domains, researchers are striving to understand the relation between general patterns of achievement behavior and characteristics of particular materials, tasks, and social settings (Boekaerts, 1995; Turner, 1995).

At the same time, literacy researchers are increasingly considering motivation important to understanding children's literacy learning (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996; Schraw & Bruning, 1999). The bulk of research on literacy motivation focuses on older elementary children, although recently there have been calls for motivational studies of emergent literacy (Wigfield, 1997). There has also been increasing interest in the motivation of children with learning disabilities (Berninger, Abbott, Whitaker, Sylvester, & Nolen, 1995; Chan, 1994; Deci & Chandler, 1986; Fuchs et al., 1997; Ginsburg, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1990; Johnston, 1985; Nicholls, McKenzie, & Shufro, 1994; Nicholls, Thorkildsen, & Bates, 1997; Pintrich, Anderman, & Klobucar, 1994).

In the study presented here, I extend research on achievement motivation, literacy learning, and learning disabilities by examining the developing motivation for literacy among young children. As I studied children at risk for reading or writing difficulty in their regular kindergarten classrooms, I explored the interactions between individuals and the social contexts in which they must learn to read, with particular attention to the social construction of what it means to read and write successfully. Children at risk for developing learning disabilities, rather than their more typically developing peers, were studied for two main reasons. First, most of the information about the motivation of learning-disabled readers and writers comes from research on older children. This study provided an opportunity to watch as children, for whom reading and writing were at least initially difficult, negotiated their first formal literacy instruction in real classrooms—perhaps laying the groundwork for their later motivation. Second, because they were less skilled than most of their peers, reading and writing were not likely to come easily to these children. This made it possible to study, in natural settings, a motivational phenomenon usually only experimentally induced: children's persistence (or lack thereof) in the face of ongoing difficulty.

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Achievement Motivation and Literacy-Learning Contexts

Achievement motivation, it has been argued, encompasses more than one view of success (Nicholls et al., 1989). Nicholls and his colleagues (Nicholls, 1989; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998) described two such general views of success: task orientation, in which success is defined as learning or personal improvement, and ego orientation, in which success is defined as demonstrating high relative ability. According to this theory, these definitions are independent: One can be both task and ego oriented (or neither), or higher in one orientation than the other. Depending on the definition employed, the meaning and relation of ability and effort are different as well. When task oriented, success requires effortful accomplishment. To the ego-oriented individual, however, achievement through effort can mean low ability if others can accomplish the same outcome with less effort.

The domain of literacy learning encompasses additional, more specific definitions of success. In reading, for example, success might entail pronouncing words correctly, comprehension of the literal meaning of the text, or a feeling that one has understood the author's intent (Freppon, 1991; Johnston, 1999). If reading is seen as something that must be done independently, receiving assistance might diminish feelings of success (Butler, 1998), but this would not be the case if reading is seen as a social activity.

The influence of a learning disability on children's feelings of success might be quite different (see McDermott, 1993) depending on the definitions of reading or writing most salient in their social environment. If, in one class, successful reading is seen as puzzling out the author's intent by discussing a book or passage with others, a learning disability may have minimal impact on feelings of accomplishment. If, in another class, it is defined as correctly reading a novel passage aloud, a learning disability may grossly interfere with success, perhaps in a highly public setting. The nature of reading or writing, as constructed in classrooms, may have a major influence on children's views of their own capabilities and their willingness to persist when struggling.

Kindergarten provides an opportunity for teachers to help students read and write at a time when they judge success based not on what others can do, but on what they can do (Nicholls, 1989). Young children are not able to make normative ability judgments independently. If one asks most first graders to rank their ability relative to others in their class, they will put themselves at or near the top of the heap, despite clear differences in ability. By later elementary school, however, children are quite capable of ranking themselves accurately (Nicholls, 1989). For a kindergartner, success means one has tried hard and is able to do something, regardless of the amount of effort or the performance of others. Therefore, even children who struggle mightily to "crack" the orthographic and phonemic codes can feel competent when they learn something new, complete a task, or receive encouragement from their teacher. It is possible, however, to highlight individual differences and make them seem important (McDermott, 1993); even young children can be made to feel incapable if their efforts are met with failure as defined in the classroom context (Nicholls, 1989).

Research on the relation between social interaction processes and motivation is still a fairly new subfield. In her review of related studies, Wentzel (1999) suggested that young children come to school with a need to form positive relationships with their teachers and achieve a sense of belonging (see also Connell & Wellborn, 1991). These needs are seen as leading children to adopt goals that reflect what their teachers communicate is important to success. Teachers' statements about their goals, therefore, are considered in this study, but also their actions related to those and other goals are examined for what they communicate to students.

One of the primary ways teachers communicate their views about what is important is through their selection of academic tasks. Turner (1995) took the position that tasks define literacy

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instruction and establish the purposes and uses of literate activity. The kinds of instructional tasks selected, then, can influence students' construction of the nature of reading and writing (Freppon, 1991; Schraw & Bruning, 1999). The relation between the kinds of tasks most frequently used in each classroom and students' views about the nature of reading and writing are explored in this study. Blumenfeld, Mergendoller, and Swarthout (1987) described several aspects of tasks that are important to motivation—both individually and in combination. In this study, I pay particular attention to the activities in which students participate (their purpose and complexity), the products for which they are responsible (clarity of expectation, cognitive demand, and representation of the nature of reading and writing), and the social organization of those tasks (individual, collaborative, and test).

In the end, classrooms are cultures with their own shared values and codes of behavior (Bloome, Harris, & Ludlum, 1991). Through their talk, individual students and the teacher establish their own and others' identities as literate beings and as members of the classroom. Reading and writing take on meaning and social importance through their uses within the classroom culture; these school meanings can be consistent or at odds with their meanings and importance at home (Heath, 1982). Children with learning disabilities, in particular, may be at risk for seeing schoolwork as detached from and irrelevant to their lives outside of school (Nicholls et al., 1994; Nicholls et al., 1997). When reading and writing are defined merely as schoolwork, the likelihood that children will seek opportunities to read and write at home may diminish—further disadvantaging students with learning disabilities.

To investigate these aspects of school literacy contexts and their relation to student motivation, I used Hicks's (1996) notion of "contextual inquiries of children's discursive activity" (p. 109) as a methodological framework. Her four framing questions are adapted here: (a) What are the shared contexts of meaning that constitute literacy-related social activity in these classrooms? (b) How is the construction of what it means to read and write enacted within particular activity structures? (c) What do individual children, specifically those at risk for reading and writing difficulty or disability, and the teacher contribute to this flow of literate activity? (d) How do individual children's reconstructions of social meaning of literacy change over time?

Finally, and central to the purposes of this study: How does the nature of literacy as constructed by kindergarten students and teachers relate to students' motivation to read and write? In particular, how might this jointly constructed literacy context influence or interact with the motivation of children for whom reading and writing are particularly difficult?

METHOD

Participants

Teachers—Four kindergarten teachers in three suburban school districts participated in this study. They were recruited from teachers who had attended a summer institute on increasing phonemic instruction in the classroom funded by the National Institutes of Health, which was one activity within a large-scale intervention study.[2] Within this group, I tried to maximize variability in population served, teaching approach, and ethnic composition as described in the

[2]This study, described in detail elsewhere (McCutchen et al., in press; McCutchen & Berninger, 1999), studied the impact on student learning of targeted early instruction in phonemic and orthographic awareness conducted by kindergarten teachers as part of their regular classroom instruction. Teachers attended a 2-week workshop that focused on learning about normal phonemic and orthographic development, their relation to reading and writing disabilities, and on developing multiple activities they could use as part of their existing classroom instruction to help students at risk for developing learning disabilities. Teachers held a variety of philosophical positions on reading instruction, although most claimed to be fairly eclectic in approach. We did not attempt to change teachers' overall approach; rather, we assisted them in developing activities that would address specific weaknesses in their struggling students, while engaging their other students. Examples of activities included singing songs based on phonemic substitutions ("I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas" changes to "I like to ate, ate, ate, aypples and banaynays") and toy-sorting games based on initial sound. Based on our observations, these appealed to almost all students in the class, while at the same time, provided additional practice to those students who needed it.

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following. In collaboration with the summer institute's research coordinator, I selected four teachers who were likely to provide opportunities to observe children from a range of backgrounds and teachers who differed in their approach to literacy instruction.[3] I explained the study to the recruited teachers during the summer institute, describing it as a study of the development of motivation to read and write. I told them that, if they agreed to participate, I would be observing in their classrooms throughout the year, watching children's motivated behavior, and describing the context (children's and teacher's words, actions, and the tasks within which they occur). All four teachers who were asked, agreed to participate. The teachers and their classrooms are described next. All names are pseudonyms.

Patti was a veteran teacher with 15 years of experience. She taught in a full-day kindergarten in a very well-equipped school in an affluent suburban district. Children in this classroom were mostly of European decent, but some children or their parents had immigrated from Asia and the Middle East. Patti's classroom was filled with children's artwork, and she worked to integrate literacy instruction with creative activities whenever possible.

Wendy taught in a full-day kindergarten in a suburban district serving low to upper middle socioeconomic status families. She had taught several different elementary grades, most recently moving to the kindergarten. Her students were mostly from lower-income families. The ethnic composition of this classroom was similar to Patti's class. Wendy emphasized journal writing, along with free-choice reading. Walls held a variety of children's artwork, teacher-made decorations, and posters.

Stacey taught in the same district as Wendy, and her students came from similar ethnic and economic backgrounds. She taught two kindergarten classes, each meeting 2.5 days per week. The class I observed met all day Monday and Wednesday, and Friday mornings, and was made up of children from the surrounding low-income neighborhood. The other class was bussed into this kindergarten through Grade-8 magnet school and were primarily from middle income families. Stacey stressed completion of structured literacy activities focused on learning the letters of the alphabet and beginning sound–letter correspondence. Walls in her room were covered with alphabet charts of various kinds.

Jan, in her third year of teaching, taught a half-day (morning) kindergarten class that was part of a split class. The kindergartners left at 11:30 a.m. each day, whereas the first graders stayed for the afternoon. The school was in a low-income area of a very mixed income suburban school district. There was a 60% turnover in the class by February. Often, new arrivals spoke little or no English. The largest group of children in this class were from Latino families and spoke Spanish as their first language, but there were a number of languages spoken in the class, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian. A few children in the class were from nonimmigrant families. The classroom was decorated with a combination of children's artwork and many number and color charts in different languages. They shared a large double room with another kindergarten through Grade-1 class, and it was often so noisy that teachers had to wear wireless microphones to be heard.

Selection of target children—As part of the larger study, children were screened at the beginning of the year for phonemic and orthographic awareness, and periodically tested with group measures during the year. On the basis of the initial measures, a subset of children in each classroom was selected as particularly at-risk for reading and writing difficulties. Target children spoke English at home and had not been identified for special education services. (In this state, the diagnosis of a learning disability cannot occur in kindergarten.) Target children

[3]The summer institute did not attempt to change teachers' general approaches to teaching reading but, rather, to augment and improve their teaching of phonemic and orthographic awareness (see McCutchen & Berninger, 1999).

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were the lowest 5 qualifying students in each class; all target children were below the 25th percentile (standardized across the total sample of 500 children) on the Test of Phonemic Awareness, in the alphabet task (the number of letters the child could write in 1 min), or both. Although I observed the whole class, I focused my classroom observations on these target children to get a sense of their motivation. Because of the number of children in Jan's classroom who did not speak English at home, the number of available children was restricted. Although none of the 4 students chosen scored above the 25th percentile on either test at the beginning of the year, their facility in English put them near the top of their class as a whole.

Data Collected

To more fully understand the nature of literacy enacted in these four classrooms, I gathered data from three perspectives: the teacher's, the students', and my own as an observer. Elements that appeared across sources were then examined, and similarities and differences in perspective on these elements became themes in the data analysis.

Fieldnotes—During classroom observation, I used a laptop computer to note as much as possible of the activities and speech of the teacher and the target children. Speech was recorded verbatim if possible and paraphrased or condensed when necessary. Later, these rough notes were turned into narrative accounts of the literacy-related events I had observed. Each classroom was observed from six to eight times over the course of the year, beginning in late fall. I timed the observations to coincide with planned literacy-related activities, but also saw math, science, and art activities as well as free-choice periods in different classrooms. Observations averaged 1 ½ hr, but ranged from 45 min to 2 ½ hr.

My role in the classroom during the observations was, for the most part, as a "fly on the wall." Occasionally, students approached me to ask for help or to ask questions, and I responded to these requests. Teachers were given access to fieldnotes, if desired. Occasionally, teachers would ask me for information about something I had observed, share some student work, or point out some ongoing activity; they also explained tasks to me as necessary. Informal interactions with teachers and students during the year were included in the fieldnotes.

Teacher interviews—After the end of the school year, each teacher was interviewed about her goals for literacy, activities to meet those goals, and about the progress of the target children in their classrooms. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were scheduled for the end of the year, immediately following generation of report cards and student assignments to first-grade classes. This timing allowed me to ask for their views on the progress of students over the course of the year while that information was relatively fresh in their minds. During end-of-year teacher interviews, I shared the data from the student interviews in aggregate form and answered any questions. These discussions were also tape recorded and transcribed.

A draft of this report was shared in 1999 with two of the teachers (Wendy and Patti) with whom I still had contact. After they each read the report, we met individually to discuss my interpretation of the data and their responses to it. Other than general approval of the interpretation, their questions centered on the description of student survey results and what the quantitative analysis showed (or did not show). Their comments were used to revise the description of those results.

Student interviews—Almost all of the students in each class had returned parent permission slips covering participation in the larger study and in the study described here. All students for whom permission was granted were interviewed by the researcher or an assistant, using a modification of the instrument developed by Baker and her colleagues (Scher & Baker,

1997). The interviews were conducted with the aid of two stuffed animals, to whom the interviewer attributed opposite attitudes toward reading and writing (e.g., “Frisky likes to read. Smoky doesn’t like to read”). The interviewer then asked the child, “Are you more like Frisky or Smoky?” Frisky liked reading, and Smoky liked writing. Responses were recorded by the interviewer on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*really like Frisky*), 2 (*kind of like Frisky*), 3 (*kind of like Smoky*), to 4 (*really like Smoky*). Often, children spontaneously elaborated on their responses; the experimenter noted these on the response sheet.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

General Analytic Strategy

All fieldnotes, interview notes, and transcripts were turned into text documents and analyzed using the software package ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 1999). This text analysis software package facilitates the iterative process of creating codes from the data, refining those codes, and looking for meaningful patterns across sources central to a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Muhr, 1991, 1996; Strauss, 1987).

Beginning with the framing questions given earlier, I repeatedly read the fieldnote documents from one teacher’s classroom. In repeated readings, I created codes related to the framing questions and refined these codes until all relevant observations were coded. Next, I read, coded, and reread this teacher’s interview document, looking for possible rationales for the teaching behaviors and interaction patterns I had observed.

Using codes developed for the first teacher, I began to read the next teacher’s fieldnotes and interview documents, creating new codes when necessary to describe events, or modifying old codes when the additional data suggested a refinement or further clarification of a category. When all of the second teacher’s documents were coded, I returned to the first teacher’s documents to look for events that might be coded using the new codes developed for the second teacher’s documents. This process was repeated until all four teachers’ documents had been coded.

The next step was to look for patterns in the codes themselves. All of the codes were entered into graphic “network views” in ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 1999) to facilitate grouping codes into larger themes; as the analysis proceeded, separate networks were generated for the themes of collaboration, motivation for journal or story writing, teacher goals and beliefs, and type of literacy activity. Using the four framing questions as a guide, I generated a new set of questions based on the codes. For example, were some codes more prevalent in one teacher’s classroom? Were there activity patterns that provided opportunities for some kinds of literacy events but not others? How did teachers’ stated goals play out in the actual activity of the classroom? How did the students help to shape the way in which teachers’ goals were implemented?

I then turned to the student interviews. Ratings of affect for reading and writing and students’ elaborations on those ratings were entered into a spreadsheet; later, the elaborations for each question were transferred to ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 1999) for motivational content analysis, and numerical ratings were analyzed using SPSS 9.0. Focusing especially on the target students’ reasons for liking or disliking reading and writing, I looked for patterns that were consistent with or challenged the roles of various motivational constructs (e.g., effort, competence, perceived ability, and interest) and for clues to the students’ views of the nature of reading and writing. Were there relations between children’s affective responses and their working definitions of reading and writing?

Finally, looking across all three data sources (fieldnotes, teacher interviews, and student interviews), I looked for connections between the children’s interview responses and

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elaborations and the kinds of activity contexts identified in the fieldnotes and teacher interviews. These patterns were evaluated in light of the following framing questions:

- What are the shared contexts of meaning that constitute literacy-related social activity in a given classroom setting? Shared contexts of meaning are most evident in the nature of frequent literacy activities that I observed in each classroom. These patterns in activity structures, however, are more understandable when informed by each teacher's literacy goals, obtained both in the end-of-year interviews and informally during observations.
- How is the construction of what it means to read and write enacted within particular activity structures in the classroom? Two aspects of activity structure seemed both to distinguish among classrooms and to have an impact on both student engagement and what they considered to be the nature of literate activity. Although all teachers made connections between literacy and life inside or outside their classrooms, these connections took different forms and had different implications for the meaning and purpose of literacy. The variety and immediacy of these connections is discussed later. Teachers differed considerably in the extent to which they saw collaboration as legitimate literate activity. The impact, on target children, of opportunities for collaboration versus individual work is described.
- What does the individual child contribute to this flow of literate activity? How do his or her discourses reconstruct the contexts from which they derive? Student–student and student–teacher conversations provided a window onto the dynamics of constructing literacy in the classroom. As teachers monitored student engagement, their interactions (e.g., encouragement, scolding, reminding) elicited particular responses from both target and nontarget students that reflected children's construction of the task. Within the context of collaboration, students negotiated their roles in literacy tasks with each other and with the teacher. Finally, children showed in their talk and actions that they reconstructed their teacher's stance toward reading and writing.
- How does the individual child's reconstruction of social meaning of literacy change over time? The fieldnotes documented changes in target children's patterns of engagement over the course of the kindergarten year. These patterns reflect, in part, the social meaning of literacy in each classroom as interpreted by the children themselves. Changes were cross checked with teachers' views of target students' development over the year in literacy skill, motivation, and social interactions. When available, informal talk with parents provided a third source of data on children's stance toward literacy.

Structure of Presentation of Data and Analysis

Because the target children were studied as embedded in the context of their classrooms, the presentation within each theme is organized by classroom. Comparisons across classrooms highlight both the similarities and variations in classroom contexts that can shape students' motivation to read and write.

Structure of Legitimate Literate Activity

Four aspects of activity structure emerged across data sources and seemed related to both engagement and students' notions of literacy. The types and variety of literacy tasks typically employed, and the amount of time given to those activities, were major shapers of the literacy context in which students and teachers functioned. To increase student motivation to read and write, all four teachers made connections between school literacy activities and students' lives outside the kindergarten classroom. The nature of these connections varied in ways consistent

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with the teachers' main literacy goals and their views of the children's needs. These connections were messages to students about the reasons for learning to read and write. Teachers also varied in their views on whether collaboration was legitimate during literacy tasks. Their support of or sanctions against peer helping also informed students about the nature of reading and writing. Finally, the extent to which teachers supported student autonomy by allowing them to choose topic and manner of completion of literacy tasks communicated their views about students as independent readers and writers. These aspects of the social meaning of school literacy were then reconstructed by students, as indicated by both observation and interview responses.

Frequent Literacy Activities: "What you Honor with Time"

The four teachers in this study shared many of the literacy activities in a typical kindergarten class. All read aloud to their students and used art projects to provide practice and extend students' experiences with letters, words, and stories. They differed in the extent to which students had the opportunity to read and write connected text, to choose their own subject matter, how structured the activities were, and the amount of time allotted to each activity.

> I think also kids know that you value what you honor with time. And so by reading and by writing and honoring them with time and not rushing kids through it? You know, [some say just give them] ten minutes to write, because look at how off-task they get, and look how long it takes them because they think they have forever? Well, I don't know any professional writer that can do it in ten minutes either. And I think that you know, your thoughts are valuable and sometimes it does take time to think. And to get kids to persist, and be able to sit until it comes is important. (Wendy, interview, June 19, 1997)

The amount of time spent in different activities shows children which kinds of literacy teachers think are important. The four classrooms differed considerably in the variety and amount of time spent in various kinds of literacy activities; these activities reflected their goals for students as articulated in the end-of-year interviews. Students' notions of reading and writing seemed to be shaped by the most frequent literacy activities in each classroom. Table 1 displays those activities that occurred in at least one half of the observations for any single classroom. The bolded items for each teacher indicate those that occurred most frequently in that room. Target students' talk about writing is displayed to give a sense of the match between time spent on an activity and students' construction of literacy.

Wendy—When asked for her two or three most important goals for her students' literacy learning, Wendy mentioned motivation first but stressed the importance of learning the necessary skills as well:

> I think first of all to create the desire to read and write and, and then provide the tools so that they could feel successful. … I didn't really have a set idea of how far they would go [but] they would have exceeded them because I wouldn't have expected so many to be reading and writing as prolifically. (interview, June 19, 1997)

Through engaging her students almost daily in writing to communicate and reading for both pleasure and information, Wendy provided many opportunities for students to experience being literate in their own particular way—through journal writing, reading and listening to stories, reading and singing songs, and reading their own writing. All of these opportunities allowed students to receive appropriate support from the teacher, the aide, or a more advanced peer. Collaboration and group work were encouraged, but children were also free to work alone. Wendy talked about the luxury of full-day kindergarten allowing for a more relaxed pace, knowing that she could let them take their time reading and writing. Reflecting the amount of time spent in class (45 min–1 hr daily), Wendy's students emphasized journal writing in their comments about liking (and not liking) to write.

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Patti—Patti also taught in a full-day kindergarten program, and she worked to provide many opportunities for students to express themselves. These included both story extensions and students' own compositions, dictated to adults. Student writing and artwork were prominently displayed and sometimes formed the basis for a literacy lesson. In their comments on liking or not liking to write, target students emphasized story writing, both collaborative and individual. As she talked about her important goals for the kindergartners' literacy, she also talked about motivation first, but in terms of competence:

> I just want them to all feel successful wherever they are and that where they are is where they should be. I think that's the most important goal, really, for kindergarten. Because that shapes their attitude. And that's going to carry with them longer than learning the sound of "A." Because I know they're going … to get [the sound of "A"] … I want them to think of learning as fun, and that they're successful at it. … And then, take them each as far as they can go, and usually that is they do all have the sounds associated with letters, and they are all reading at some point. But all different places, you know. But beginning to get the idea that these sounds blend together.

Children in this district had, for the most part, parents with high levels of income, education, and expectation for their children's performance in school. Over 95% of the students graduating from the high school enter college. Given the general atmosphere of pressure to achieve, Patti's concern for her students' feelings of competence was natural.

Stacey—Although in the same district as Wendy, Stacey taught in a half-time program. I observed her Monday–Wednesday group, from the surrounding low-income neighborhood. They split Fridays with the higher socioeconomic status, Tuesday–Thursday group bussed into this magnet school. Her goals stemmed, in part, from her experience as a first-grade teacher: She wanted students to learn the skills they would need to survive in school:

> Letters of the alphabet, recognizing them and telling me what they are in random order. … The flow of language. Not necessarily learning how to read but learning that when an adult reads to you, that there's certain times when their voices go up and go down, and stopping at periods and stuff like that. … In writing, knowing that what you say can be written. … And the first thing I had to do with those Monday Wednesday kids is [convince them] "You need to do this stuff. You know, this isn't, I'm not trying to shove stuff down your throat, but you kind of need to have some of this stuff, you should have had it already and you don't, so, so that life in first grade isn't pure hell. (interview, June, 1997)

Stacey ran her classroom efficiently to get the most out of the time she had, following a routine that allowed her to spend 1 week on each letter of the alphabet. The set of activities for teaching the letter of the week were consistent across the year and required students to say or write single letters or words, often accompanied by illustrations or collages of objects beginning with the target letter. Students completed tasks individually. Her students tended to talk about writing as drawing, especially her target students.

Jan—Jan taught in a morning kindergarten through Grade-1 split in a low-income, high-turnover area. Most of her students spoke English as a second language, some arriving with no English at all, and some reasonably fluent in both home language and English. Jan used many English-as-a-second-language teaching strategies with her students, including frequent choral repetition of physical activities or procedures and display of number charts in all of the languages spoken in the room. Jan shared a double room with another teacher, so there were often 60 students in attendance; noise levels were often high. Jan's first goal was motivation; unlike Stacey, she was not as worried about students acquiring skills prior to first grade:

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> … That the kids are interested in reading and writing, and it's something that they want to do. So they're drawing pictures, and they're looking at books, and they're choosing those things. That's my main goal, because I feel like that's what takes them into first grade. And I think of first grade as being more learning how to read and doing more writing. In terms of academics, the other kindergarten teacher and I have a goal that the kids can recognize the alphabet, you know, in random order. The upper case and the lower case, and they do have legible fine motor writing by the, and they can write their names. And recognizing their names and some names around of their friends, some of the calendar words. But we don't have a sight word list or anything that we've developed at a kindergarten level. (interview, June 26, 1997)

Jan stressed connections between children's lives and literacy using journals (often a picture followed by dictation to an adult—later in the year, children then copied the dictation in their own handwriting); cards and written gifts for family members; and discussion and writing about familiar foods, holidays, plants, and animals. Drawing or coloring pictures was an important adjunct to all written work, which often focused on familiar objects and experiences. All three target children said they liked to write but stressed different aspects: One talked of writing as drawing, one saw journal writing as valuable because "it's about learning," and one liked to write but thought journals sometimes took too long. Several immigrant students in the class talked about writing to and for family members, both as gifts and communication to distant relatives.

Impact of Activity Structure: Evidence From Student Interviews

The interview items focused on children's liking of literacy activities and elicited spontaneous explanations from many of the children. I used "liking" reading and writing as a general way to get at students' intrinsic motivations, as well as to get a sense of how they defined reading and writing. Student perspectives were then compared to my interpretations of the field observations and the views of their teachers. These comparisons have been presented throughout the previous sections of this report. The impact of activity structure and motivational strategies on children's notions of reading and writing can be seen in the reasons raised in students' discussion of their like, or dislike, of literacy. Table 2 shows the proportion of children in each class mentioning each aspect of writing when asked the interview question, "Frisky likes writing, Smoky doesn't like writing. Are you more like Frisky or Smoky?"

A large proportion of children in all four classes talked of writing as drawing (e.g., "I like to write houses") but more so in Patti's and Stacey's classrooms, consistent with the amount of time spent on drawing to accompany words and letters (Stacey) or sentences (Patti). In Patti's class, in which students had many opportunities to write or dictate extended text, children emphasized story writing and recording their own experiences. Wendy's students mentioned journals most frequently, and 4 of them mentioned liking to share their writing with others. The only other student to mention sharing was in Patti's class. There were more regular opportunities to do this in Wendy's classroom than in any of the others'. It is interesting to note that Stacey's students more often talked about writing at home; because of the lack of opportunities to write extended text in school, they may actually have done more writing at home. In addition, the emphasis on doing one's own work and finishing may have been behind the relatively large proportion of students in Stacey's class who mentioned ability when asked about liking writing.

One unexpected pattern emerged for mentions of liking writing because it was fun. The largest proportion of students who mentioned fun were in Jan's classroom, and Jan did work hard to make literacy fun. However, the two classrooms in which students did the most writing of connected text (Wendy's and Patti's) had the smallest proportion of children who mentioned fun as a reason for liking to write. It is possible that fun could be a default general answer to

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the question and that Patti's and Wendy's students, having more experience, could think of more specific reasons.

In summary, the content analysis of the interview data showed patterns consistent with field observations: The aspects of literacy children discussed reflected, in part, the kinds of literacy contexts experienced at school and their actions therein. This suggests that students' definitions of reading and writing are shaped, in part, by the choice of frequent literacy activities. This should be taken into account when interpreting young students' responses to questions about literacy. When they say they like writing, do they mean drawing? Writing individual alphabet letters? Writing connected text? Completing worksheets?

Connections and Engagement in Literacy

All four teachers talked about increasing student motivation but not necessarily in the same sense. This was evident in their different use of connections between literacy and life beyond kindergarten, one of the main motivational strategies employed. Not all teachers talked about this as "making connections," although all teachers used this strategy to some extent. What was connected to literacy, and how, is characteristic of the differences in the unique literacy contexts created by place and time, student characteristics, and teachers' goals for their students.

Stacey—Stacey highlighted two kinds of connection between literacy and life. Many of the activities and the content of direct instruction centered on words as labels for things. Students were told, for example, to be "letter detectives" and to figure out which word labeled each color or number; they copied words from illustrated word cards and made their own illustrations. When a girl found a strange folder on her desk one morning, Stacey pointed out that it was labeled with the name of a girl from the Tuesday–Thursday class. Her second strategy reflected her concern that children learned the skills of first grade, often stressing its approach. This was a fairly typical occurrence after winter break (in six out of eight observations) as Stacey worked toward first-grade readiness (Stacey, informal conversation, January 15, 1997):

> "If I came around and didn't know who you were, could I tell by looking at your paper? Would your name be on it, in pencil? The first grade way?" Stacey goes around to check, giving praise and correction, often saying, "First grade way, from now on." (fieldnotes, January 13, 1997)
>
> Stacey tells the class to check to make sure all their C's go the same way. "When you get older you have to hand things in with everything perfect. You get marked down if your C's go the wrong way." (fieldnotes, February 12, 1997)

She saw this emphasis as having a positive impact on target students' motivation:

> As [Kevin] started realizing that we're moving on to first [grade], I mean he was excited about being a first grader. So as he started understanding that "I'm going to have to do this for a long time? So that maybe I'd better start making this fun." (interview, June, 1997)

In interviews at the end of the year, Kevin himself was confident at the end of the year that even though "I can't read," he would "get more better" in first grade and "will learn." Although his optimism was shared by three of his fellow target students who rated themselves likely to do well, two were not so sanguine. "I'm worried that I might not get an A," admitted Tommy. He and Darrin both felt they would really not do well in reading in first grade.

Jan—The large number of children for whom English was a second or new language, coupled with the high turnover rate and half-day program, made literacy instruction very challenging for Jan. Throughout the year, she tried to provide many opportunities for children to practice

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oral and written language by making connections to the events in their own lives. In her interview, Jan described moving from children's oral "news of the day" to daily written journal entries by the end of the school year:

> [In October] I switched to "News of the Day," where they all went around and said something, and I drew one person's name and wrote that up [on the board]. And that went really well until about April. And then that was just getting so they couldn't sit through it, and I also had a big turnover rate through the time that I started that.
>
> [During that same time period on] Mondays they did a weekend journal where they just wrote things about their weekend, and they wrote the date. And then in April I, I changed it to everyday journals til the end of the year. So that was kind of like the transfer, from, from "News of the Day" to kind of their own independent news of the day. And that went really well. And some of the kindergartners started to do some invented spelling. A lot of them were more independent about writing the date, and maybe like a couple words that they wrote every time like, "My friend" or "my" or "the." (interview, June 26, 1997)

To increase children's interest in reading, Jan provided a variety of books for children to read during choice time. She connected to children's interest in topics of study (insects, foods, and holidays) by including library books on these topics (Jan, interview, June 26, 1997):

> Most kids, you know, every now and then they would choose a book. It's usually around a subject that we're studying and the books are around. And the kids are huddled around those books and going "Whoa!" and looking at the pictures.

Patti—The majority of the connections observed in Patti's class involved relations between books and children's social knowledge, their science projects, home life, or their own writing and art. In the following example, Patti pulls together three of these dimensions:

> Patti shows the book she will read later about friendship. She tells them the title and shows the cover, then asks what it might be about. A few kids guess. Patti asks about taking turns, sharing, connects these practices to friendship. She takes them over to the wall where she has displayed the pictures of "meanies" that they drew and wrote about earlier, in response to the book *The Meanies.* "Isn't it neat when the pictures match the words?" she exclaims. She leads the class in reading each caption (e.g., "Meanies cut in line. Meanies lie. Meanies slam your finger in the door") and talks about how the picture shows what is in the sentence.
>
> When they return to the circle, Patti shows them another book on friendship, reminds them that they brainstormed ideas on friendship (she points to a chart in which these ideas have been recorded). She reads what is written as characteristics of "friendlies."
>
> Daniel suggests, "We should tape up that book so we can remember."
>
> Patti tells them, "You have wonderful brains and I know you will brainstorm more things." (fieldnotes, February 6, 1997)

Every observed unit of instruction was linked to a book, poem, or song in some way, as well as art projects or other hands-on experiences. When the class hatched chicks, several books about eggs and scientists who study them were read and discussed. They created egg books, cooked and ate eggs, and recorded their favorite preparation method on a wall chart. A unit on the Chinese New Year included fiction and nonfiction books, making dragon puppets, and a trip to a Chinese restaurant in the International district. In part, this was an outgrowth of Patti's goal that children should see learning as fun, and was made possible by the time and resources available to her in this affluent, full-day kindergarten. In fact, the majority of children in the class were engaged in literacy activities most of the time and seemed to truly enjoy them.

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Patti also provided direct links between home and literacy by checking out *storyboxes* to students every week. These were file card boxes with small figures of people and animals inside. Children would take these home and write a story using all of the figures in some way, with help from family members. Then they would bring the story and box back to school, where Patti would read the story aloud while the author manipulated the figures to show the action. Children raptly attended to these stories and applauded enthusiastically for their authors. Finally, toward the end of the year, the children began writing and publishing their own newspaper for parents, detailing the events in their classroom. Most of these stories were collaborations between two or more students and were shared and discussed with the rest of the class before the final product (with layout and production by parent volunteers) was produced and sent home.

Wendy—Wendy's most frequent use of connections entailed connecting literate activity to the children's everyday lives through journals. The emphasis on journals was a new strategy for Wendy this year. Every day, Wendy would model the process of creating a journal entry about something that had happened in her own life outside of school. Then, students would create their own journal entry, either independently or with help from an adult or peer. At the beginning, most children drew a picture and then dictated their entry to an adult scribe. During the day, she would mark topics for later journal entries, especially during sharing:

> 8:35 Sharing time: Wendy welcomes back girl who's been sick, elicits story, asks "Is that what you're going to write about in your journal?" Girl nods. To another girl: "And what are you showing me, G? New earrings? Are you going to write about those in your journal?" T engages the group in a conversation about what writers do: "Sometimes they write more than one page, if they have that much to say." (fieldnotes, November 15, 1996)

As the year progressed, sharing time turned into journal reading time. Students first wrote about an event, then read it aloud to the class, and responded to questions about what they wrote and requests for elaboration. Therefore, writing became a natural part of communicating about important events in the classroom:

> Journals are really an important part of my life. And I'm thinking, yeah, this is a way to share the value, it's one thing to use your words and say "yeah, this is really important you go do it," and another to say "yeah, this is really important, look, I'm doing it, and I'm getting pleasure." (Wendy, interview, June 19, 1997)

Most children eventually took pleasure in writing and reading from their journals: 22 out of 24 children interviewed said that they liked doing journals. For 3 of the target children in this class, motivation to write was more of a struggle. Kelly resisted journal writing to the end. She had very low skills and was probably aware that others finished faster, although her bravado never waned. One day when we were reading a familiar book together, she said disgustedly, "Anyway, I already know how to read." She spent most of her journal time trying to avoid actually working, although sometimes she seemed to enjoy doing the accompanying drawing. Marina got along during journal time by having another child write for her—disguising the fact that she could not write herself. Once Wendy figured this out, she provided additional support for Marina's own writing attempts, and by the end of the year, Marina was completing her journal entries quickly and accurately:

> I noticed that Marina [was] "failing to thrive" [smiles] and I really started throwing energy in that direction. And [she], just foom! … just, kind of like my flowers lately, foom! A foot in a day! [By the end of the year] she was really strongly motivated and she would be in my face … she wasn't going to take, "Wait a minute." … But that desire's so strong … I see her competency obviously just, incredible. Her motivation was just incredibly strong to write and to read. I think playing teacher was a really

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> big thing as well. But getting up and using the reading wand and having her class. And she was real demanding. She expected more out of them than I got [laughs]. (Wendy, interview, June 19, 1997)

This impression matched Marina's interview responses, during which she pointed out that she liked journals because she liked "writing about what I did."

Writing about one's own experience may be particularly exciting to kindergarteners, who seem naturally eager to share these experiences with anyone who will listen. For Marty, a small, shy, and very quiet boy, it seemed to become a safe and structured way to communicate with others. In a brief informal interview the following year, Marty's mother described him as "just a very shy little boy, and kindergarten was hard for him." Marty was almost invariably found playing or running alone at recess, despite his peers' invitations to join their play. Well-behaved and compliant in class, Marty initially had a difficult time getting started with journals, although he would eventually get something down on paper. The following is a typical example of his response to journal time during the first half of the year:

> 9:10 Kids get their journals and move to their seats. Marty is playing with his pencil.
>
> 9:22 Marty is still playing with his pencil.
>
> 9:24 Marty is up at the supply shelf getting another pencil.
>
> 9:32 Marty still hasn't started his journal page.
>
> 9:37 Marty has drawn a picture in his journal. He writes the date on his page, then laboriously "I … W … A … S … " and shows the teacher. "Great! 'I was … ' she encourages him to keep going with "sick."
>
> 9:42 Marty is still writing.
>
> 9:45 Marty shows Wendy his writing. She tells him "excellent story!" (Wendy, fieldnotes, February 3, 1997)

The next day is Marty's turn to share from his journal. An event occurs at the beginning of journal time that provides something exciting for him to write about. Because of the way Wendy organized journal writing as sharing, Marty now has both something exciting to say and a structured venue for saying it:

> Today at the beginning of journal time, Marty volunteers (along with most of the class) to go with Mrs. Sharp, the reading specialist, in lieu of her regularly-scheduled student, who refused.
>
> 9:30 Marty returns and gets his journal out. He opens it to the last page, picks up a pencil, then sits for a while. In a few minutes he begins to draw a picture with his pencil.
>
> 9:35 Marty is continuing to work in the midst of chaos around him as two boys try to erase some mark on the table. Many kids are reading, but many are wandering. Marty is erasing something at the top of his page. Four boys at the next table are playing with a windup toy. Marty takes his journal to the teacher, who writes something to his dictation.
>
> Time for journal sharing; the kids sit in a circle on the floor. After two others share, Marty takes the author's chair and reads his entry in a very quiet voice. "I went to Mrs. Sharp's room today." He shows his picture. Walter asks him to say it louder. He repeats it.
>
> Arthur asks, "Was it was fun?" Marty nods.

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> Terry asks, “What did you do there?”
>
> Marty says softly, “Played games.” Keenan wants to know, “Did you get a sticker?”
>
> Marty whispers, “Yes” and shows the sticker on his hand. Everyone claps for Marty.

This seems a watershed in his interest in writing. From this point, Marty seems much more engaged during journal time, getting started even before the bell signals the start of school, and writing with concentration. In her end-of-year interview, Wendy calls him “the journal king”:

> I think [Marty’s desire to write] came in when he realized that perhaps it wasn’t going to go away. He was going to come in and look at that journal every morning. And there was no punishment attached, but certainly he’d have to face it. And I started encouraging him to think, you know, before he got to school, or as things happened during the day, I would tell him, “Oh, you might want to remember this for your journal tomorrow.” Maybe just raising it to a conscious level. (Wendy, interview, June 19, 1997)

Wendy seemed to see the change in Marty’s attitude as bowing to the inevitable and finding it not so bad. From my perspective, the discovery that he could tell others things that he had written and that they would listen with interest, seemed heady stuff. The purpose of writing, then, was to communicate something of value and not just to complete and illustrate a sentence to satisfy the teacher. Marty’s mother said she had also noticed that he just seemed to become interested in reading and writing around February or March of his kindergarten year: “It took him a long time to get comfortable with the kids. But now he’s always wanting to read and write.”[4]

In addition to using journals to increase student motivation, Wendy used them to teach writing skills through modeling the writing process. By repeatedly showing students what a writer does, she helped form her students’ notions of the nature of writing. Again, Wendy highlighted the fact that these skills were modeled in context, rather than taught separately:

> And so they get to see me go through that process and be a learner, a discoverer, a writer, a communicator, that whole thing is just opened up. And … I had no idea how rich those experiences would be. You know, just telling my story but knowing I’m not going to write everything down because we’re kindergartners. And having to pick a topic sentence, “What’s the most important thing I said?” So checking for understanding from my audience, but also doing … the thinking out loud with my kids? It was such a natural forum. (interview, June 19, 1997)

Support for Student Autonomy

In all four classrooms, students had periods of choice time, usually, but not always, requiring them to finish some other activity or task before choosing. Often, these were open times when any appropriate activity was okay (playing games, dress-up corner, coloring, reading, or blocks), but sometimes children were limited to certain kinds of materials. In Wendy’s class, the period after finishing journals was literacy choice time; in Stacey’s room, the regular math instruction time was sometimes a math choice time. These periods allowed students to be autonomous—choosing not only their activity but who (if anyone) they wished to work with.

[4]The following year, I observed Marty telling and retelling his original version of a pattern story to his first- and second-grade classmates. In contrast to his desultory engagement during most of the independent seatwork I observed him completing during his first-grade year, he was completely absorbed in creating the props for and telling his own story. He told it to anyone who would listen and practiced alone when he could not find an audience: I observed him telling the story at least 10 times. According to his mother, he told her his story an additional 5 or 6 times at home. When writing was storytelling, Marty was a writer, working for his own purposes, only satisfied when he had engaged his audience. When writing was filling in worksheets, he became just a worker, completing assigned tasks and satisfied to be done.

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The teachers differed, however, in the amount of autonomy given to students during more formal work periods. This seemed a function both of the amount of available time (full or half time) and of the teacher's individual style.

Wendy—Journal topics were never assigned in the eight observations of Wendy's class: Children were free to choose a different topic or to change their minds. This was characteristic of her general tendency toward autonomy support (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and a trust in children's decision-making power. During journal writing time, students were free to help or receive help from other students or adults or even collaborate on sentence or illustration as they saw fit. During whole-group instruction, she also allowed for variation in students' strategies. In the following excerpt, Wendy capitalizes on an unexpected interest to increase motivation for literacy but, at the same time, models flexibility in decision making:

> Circle time at the chalkboard; they have just finished reading a message on the board in unison. Wendy writes "e" and asks if they can find any *e*s in the message. Calls on girl to circle one. Calls on more children until all *e*s are circled: In the midst of this, Manuel comes up unbidden, Wendy tells him to return to seat, but Manuel tells her, "I have an e in my name," which wins teacher acknowledgement and praise. (Later she tells me he has not shown before that he is aware of individual letters in words.) During a small interruption, a boy called on circles an *e* in Wesley's name on the board. This causes comment in class, as kids protest that "Wesley" is not in the message, but Wendy asks them, "Is that an *e*?" and treats it as an OK thing to do. *e* finding in the sentence finishes, but Wendy notes that Michael has found an *e* outside the sentence, and creates an optional task for after journals, the "*e* hunt": Find *e*s in the classroom (in words posted around room).

Although children of this age tend to be sensitive to classroom routine (Fivush, 1984), Wendy frequently modeled that it is acceptable to change strategies if one keeps moving toward the goal.

Further supporting autonomy, but in the service of literacy goals, children usually had several choices for literacy-related activities after finishing journal entries. Often, children would gather in pairs and small groups to look at books; those who could read often read to others during this time. On this day, students gradually drift from other activities into the *e* hunt:

> 9:25 About half the kids are now actively hunting *e*s, some singly, some in packs.
>
> 9:45 Almost all the kids are now hunting for *e*s. Miguel has a hand lens and is finding *e*s in the title of a book on the chalk tray. "Two *e*s! Three!" He points them out to two friends. A girl wanders past me, "I love this *e* hunt! Maybe we'll do another hunt tomorrow!" Blake, who is often off task and wandering, even during circle time, comes up to me and asks to examine my notebook for *e*s. Finding one in the sentence "One boy is hunting *e*s," he writes *e* in his little book. I read the sentence to him. He nods and wanders off.
>
> 10:00 Things are winding down. Why is the *e* hunt so exciting? I ask several kids why they liked the *e* hunt so much, and ask the T to ask the group in the circle. The responses are all variations on:
>
> "Because! It's a hunt! I like hunts."
>
> "'Cause you get to find 'em."
>
> "'Cause there was lots of *e*s."
>
> "'Cause there were lots of *e*s and we couldn't find them all, even if we tried for days and days!"

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> "Because I could find lots of *e*s."
>
> One boy explains that you have to be quiet so you do not scare the *e*s away when you are hunting them.

Later, I reflected on the reasons for children's engagement with the *e* hunt:

> Everyone could do the activity, but no one knew where all the *e*s were. There was no competition or comparing of numbers that I saw, though individuals would come up to me or the teacher to show us how many they had found. There seemed to be something exciting about finding something that was all through their environment but that they hadn't paid much attention to before. Hunts! (Wendy, fieldnotes, November 15, 1996)

However, it became clear in subsequent days that choice was central to students' engagement. When Wendy tried to organize hunts for different letters, it quickly became just another piece of schoolwork done because the teacher assigned it. In addition to encouraging flexibility in the way students carried out activities, even Wendy's planned instructional time could be modified, on occasion, by students:

> 8:58 Wendy shows Valentine's Day handout, and then reads a Valentine's poem twice … "We're going to do some books on love … "
>
> "No, I want to do my journal!" protests a boy.
>
> Wendy continues, "But they're in my trunk so we're going to do journals, what the heck." She gets a pad of paper and tells a story of cutting sheetrock off of her walls to deal with flood damage. She asks if they ever change their minds about what they're going to write about?"
>
> "Like Kelly," said a boy.
>
> "Yes like Kelly did yesterday when she told us what she was going to write and then changed her mind." Wendy tells them that she's changed her mind, then tells a story about her mother getting flooded. (fieldnotes, February 6, 1997)

In this exchange, Wendy demonstrates that both children and adults change their minds: Freedom to choose is not the exclusive property of grown-ups.

Patti—In addition to choice time, Patti also offered choices within more structured activities. For example, children worked on story pattern extensions (papers with a sentence following a repeated structure in a book but with blanks for the variable words: "'Lovely mud!' said the pig, and he ______ in it."). This kind of activity usually included a brainstorming session duting which many possible ideas were generated and recorded on the board, and then children could use any words they wanted for their strip. They could also choose whether to work alone or collaboratively.

Jan—Jan also provided some choice within activities: Journal topics were open, and children were encouraged to follow their own ideas when doing some structured project. For example, for Martin Luther King Day, children completed "I have a dream" posters with their own ideas about what the world should be like, with children generating text (dictated and then copied) and drawing illustrations. These were read aloud to the class, with Jan commenting positively on the ideas, as well as the workmanship. Although she encouraged children to pick reading as a choice-time activity by reading to small voluntary groups, she also monitored students' choices as an indicator of their motivation to read and write.

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Stacey—Stacey's opportunities for choice were more controlled. The same basic kinds of activities were used for each letter of the week, providing a predictable structure. When activities called for students to choose a word, there were certain rules followed. Each child must have a unique word, and none of the words could come from the book. The following excerpt captures one such event when children were working on the same kind of story extensions used by Patti and Wendy. The book she had just read to the students was *Oh, no!* (Scarfe, 1994) about a little girl who has holes in her belongings. The children were to make pages for a class book using the same pattern:

> 1:50 She passes papers out to each child, on which have been printed, "There's a hole in my ______." She asks each child what they are going to draw before she will give them a paper. The quickest students get the most obvious objects (e.g., paper, shirt, basketball). Those who pick something in the book or that another child has picked are told to think of another. "No, that was in the book. You can't use what was in the book." To another, "No, Christian already has that word. You need to listen!" Thad and Leann (two target students) are the last ones left. After several false starts, Leann looks at the chalk tray and says "chalk."
>
> Quickly, Stacey asks, "What made the hole?"
>
> She replies hesitantly, "A person?"
>
> Stacey lets her go. Thad finally comes up with "schoolbus."

It is not clear why it was important to have unique words for each student. It was not to control the difficulty of the word: Chalk required knowing that the "ch" sound was made by two letters together (something not taught yet) and contained a silent *l.* In this activity, Stacey was particularly interested in whether students could figure out the initial letter or sound in their word, but this was impossible for Leann to do:

> 2:36 Children are working on unfinished tasks, then have choice time. Leann comes over to get a baby wipe to clean up some spilled glue.
>
> "How's your cold?" I ask.
>
> She tells me, "I'm better. But I still haven't figured out those numbers for the chalk."
>
> "You mean the letters?"
>
> "Yeah," she sighs. "I'll never learn." She goes over to finish cleaning up. (Stacey, fieldnotes, March 10, 1997)

This control over words seemed related to Stacey's views on collaboration in general (discussed later) and a tendency toward control (itself a function, perhaps, of feeling she was fighting a losing battle to prepare these children to survive first grade in a limited amount of time).

Social Structure of Literate Activity: Collaboration Versus Individual Work

Field observations in the four classrooms reveal different patterns in the social structuring of literate activity. Table 3 displays the most frequent activity structures observed in each classroom. There were some common structures across classooms: All teachers did some large-group instruction, and all assigned some individual work. During my observations, Jan, Patti, and Wendy had both multiple tasks going on at the same time, often in small groups, and uniform tasks in which everyone worked on the same task at the same time. In Stacy's class, the tasks I observed were almost always uniform. A uniform task structure makes it easier for children to compare their work to others'. This social comparison often concerned how quickly students finished a task. A focus on finishing was evident in teacher and aide remarks in Stacey's class (26 out of 34 adult comments on finishing work observed were in this classroom), and this may have heightened students' awareness of relative ability: 25% of her students raised

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issues of ability when answering questions about motivation to write, as compared to 0% to 4% in the other classes.

A uniform structure can also make salient issues of collaboration and copying, either open or surreptitious. Teachers' responses to collaboration and copying depended, in part, on their views of the nature and meaning of individual differences and on their notions of children's feelings of safety, confidence, and self-esteem. During my first observation in Wendy's class, she discovered that Cristin had been scribing (writing to dictation) for a target child, Marina. Wendy recalled this at our interview in June:

> And so for a long time I didn't know that Marina wasn't doing it. Because I didn't see it. She was independently handling it. And I think, you know, what a great way to learn! … Another thing that happened this year was that there were children who came in reading. And they became peer tutors immediately. And I think that that kind of sets the stage for, "Oh, I can do this, there's a kid! That kid can do it, I can do it." So maybe believing in themselves. And it was a real safe, I mean Marty was even helping kids write things down. (interview, June 17, 1997)

This sentiment was echoed by Patti, who encouraged children to collaborate; both contributing to the same joint project:

> Erica and Nell (a target child) are coloring a black and white tiled floor on their collaborative picture. They have each started at one side of the picture and are working toward each other. Erica has three rows of tiles, Nell four. Nell notes, "Just because they're not the same, that's OK." (fieldnotes, February 6, 1997)

Patti also freely allowed peer helping, which enabled all of the target children to complete tasks that were (or that they thought were) too difficult for them to complete on their own:

> Mallory has redrawn her house to look more like her friend's. (Later) Mallory is copying the relevant word from Venita's paper. Cathy looks at Erin who is now writing (they have similar pictures). "Can I copy you?" I hear no response. Cathy goes back to coloring. (fieldnotes, March 17, 1997)

Patti was comfortable with copying, seeing it as just another form of collaboration:

> Mallory, I think, was much more capable than she felt she was. But she was real afraid to risk and to try things, and she felt more comfortable doing what someone else was doing. And hers always looked beautiful, because she had fabulous small muscle. But she felt more confident sitting next to Ollie or Venita or somebody else, and writing what they were writing.
>
> When I asked about widespread copying of less- from more-able girls, Patti replied, "I do think that those little girls, they were all bright kids, and they, they may be learning differently, and developmentally maybe differently, so some of them are picking up on that quickly and easily, but the other ones are just as bright in their own way. So they would still be a match." (interview, June 25, 1997)

The students themselves, however, were the ones to negotiate the terms of the collaboration. Copying was acceptable between partners only. When Patti inadvertently gave the students a very difficult task, copying flourished, but reactions varied. In the following scene, Patti has just read aloud a book about colors, and the children are completing story extension papers with the same pattern. An example of a sentence from the book shows the following pattern: "Purple yells 'Yum! Bubblegum!'" Students' extension papers say, "______ says ______ ______." They have brainstormed lists of rhyming words that might be used to fill in the blank, and these are displayed on a chart:

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> I go over to Sherry and Cathy, they are copying from the book. Sherry says to me, “Other kids are blaming us and we’re just thinking.”

Faced with a task too difficult for them to complete, even collaboratively, Sherry and Cathy solved the problem by using answers from the book—copying directly from the original. Apparently their tablemates objected to this as cheating, but they resolved to do it anyway. In this case, collaboration involved maintaining a united front against the objections of others. Sarah and Venita have a different arrangement, with one student depending totally on the other for guidance, even though the guide is herself not sure of what to do:

> Sarah arranges to copy Venita’s paper because she “can’t do it.” Venita writes, “Purple yells yum” (from the book), then gets words from the chart to write “come plum some.” She draws a picture of a girl blowing bubble gum (like the picture in the book) and goes to show Patti. Sarah has copied Venita’s work exactly.
>
> Patti looks at Venita’s work and says it rhymes but it doesn’t make sense. Venita comes back to the table and erases the second sentence.
>
> Sarah asks, “Why are you erasing it?” “’Cause,” replies Venita.
>
> Voice rising, Sarah demands, “Just tell me why!”
>
> “’Cause I have to change it.” Venita writes, “big juicy plum,” asking for and getting some assistance from me on how to spell juicy.

It is clear that Venita is not sure why she must change her first attempt, or she would be able to explain it to Sarah. However, Venita is armed with Patti’s instructions to “make sense” with her words. To make sure, she heads off to show the teacher. Feeling abandoned, Sarah protests:

> “You said I could copy!”
>
> “But you wrote in crayon,” Venita points out—so she can’t erase. (Sarah has crossed out the words on her second line.)
>
> Sarah, now really distraught, cries, “But I can’t do it! I need to copy! You said!” in a loud whiny voice.
>
> Venita, trying to get away, explains, “I need to show the teacher.”
>
> “But I can’t do it!” wails Sarah.
>
> “OK, I need to show Mrs. _____ and then I’ll bring it back. God!”
>
> “You’re not supposed to say that,” chides Sarah primly. Venita goes with a sigh.
>
> Across the table, I notice that Nell is stuck with one word, “silver.” I make several attempts to help but am rebuffed. I find out later that she is waiting for her partner Erica to return, so she can copy from her. (Patti, fieldnotes, April 25, 1997)

The change in the emotional tone of the class during this activity was remarkable. It was the only time I observed the students in this class struggling with a task far beyond their capabilities. Patti herself was not an obvious source of pressure; she did her best to scaffold the activity and support students’ efforts; yet, stakes clearly rose for the children. Could the affluent and achievement-oriented background of most of the students have contributed to this response? Was it merely the fact that, for once, they did not understand how to complete the task? Regardless of the source of the angst, this task provided strong evidence that collaboration had been established as legitimate in this classroom. It is clear that Sarah, Nell, Sherry, and Cathy (all target children) saw copying as a right, once negotiated, and that they were willing to stand up to peers (or observers) who tried to interfere.

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In Jan's class, helping was encouraged, especially given the number of students for whom English was still a struggle. However, Jan asked students to help by telling others what to do rather than doing the work for them:

> Soledad … goes to Tanya to help her with [her math paper]. T comes by, admires Soledad's work, but asks her to help Tanya by telling her what to do and not doing it for her. (fieldnotes, January 22, 1997)
>
> Class is doing a nutrition worksheet together. Alice is right on and helps Esteban. There is a brief pause for checking papers, then they resume. When finished, Jan tells them to check their neighbors to see if they are finished or need help. (fieldnotes, March 5, 1997)

The first three teachers believed that encouraging collaboration and mutual assistance could lead to increased student learning. Stacey, in contrast, saw peer help as a hindrance to individual learning, and this belief was enacted frequently by both teacher and students. Stacey was particularly concerned with two of the target children who frequently copied others' work, and her emphasis on individual work on uniform tasks made it easy to spot cheating:

> [Referring to Kevin] Letters didn't intrigue him at all. I mean, he did what he was supposed to do, a lot of times it was what his neighbor had put on his paper. Sometimes he knew what he was doing, sometimes he didn't. [But] he was very compliant. "I'll do it because that's what I'm supposed to be doing." (interview, June 1997)

In class, Stacey emphasized doing one's own work and that copying only hurts the copier by preventing learning. This stance was recreated by the children, as in the following event:

> Stacey introduces a second worksheet, writing the alphabet (some letters are already filled in). … She suggests that they can look around the room at the many alphabet charts to see what letters go in the blanks. "Be a letter detective."
>
> Later, as children are working at their tables, Bradley bursts out, "Don't tell him! Don't tell him!"
>
> Ralph (the classroom aide) goes over and says "Shhh."
>
> Bradley continues, entreating the others not to help Kevin, "Don't tell him because then he'll know and he needs to figure it out himself!" Ralph listens and doesn't interfere.
>
> Later, T comes over to these two and tells Kevin, "I'm going to ask you one more time. Please don't look at Bradley's paper. I know you can do this by yourself. The only thing you do when you look is keep yourself from learning. I know you can do this."
>
> For the next few minutes Kevin tries. He begins to look around the room, sighs, plays with his pencil, takes a quick peek at Bradley's paper, then raises his hand. When he gets no response, he lowers his hand, looks at the alphabet over the board. He yawns, looks around. When Ralph nears, Kevin raises his hand and gets some help. He writes a letter on his paper, then stops and looks at the papers of two girls on his other side. When Ralph asks "How ya doin' Kevin?" he snaps back to his paper, but attention wanders again as Ralph moves off. (Stacey, fieldnotes, January 13, 1997)

As Stacey noted earlier, Kevin is compliant. The rules are clear—both the teacher and the students reiterate them frequently—but Kevin seems to see no way of completing the task on his own. Stymied, his attention wanders, kept in check only by adult monitoring.

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Darrin was also a focus of concern for Stacey. Stacey noted that he seemed to become more motivated to learn toward the end of the year, but he lacked support for reading at home, and his skills were still low:

> Darrin went from not feeling that school was important, just somewhere to go because my older sister goes, to understanding that "maybe I'd better light a fire under myself and get going on this stuff." He really did go from knowing not much to knowing, to producing a lot but not caring that he was producing it, but "I'll make the teacher happy." His motivation was more the fact that his mother, on the parental side, his mother got out of jail and started visiting, and started saying, you know, "You don't want to end up like me." … On the school side, I started involving him in being the one to pick out the books, for reading. Sort of like "If you want to hear about something interesting, then why don't you go get a book that you really want." Knowing that he wasn't being read to at home. (interview, June 1997)

One of her biggest frustrations with Darrin was that he often copied work from his neighbors; thus, in her view, depriving himself of any opportunity to learn. This can be contrasted to the more Vygotskian views of the other three teachers, who believed this kind of imitation could lead to skill development and eventual independence.

Stacey's concern with Darrin's copying came to a head during a follow up to the *When This Box is Full* (Lillie, 1993) she had read to them for *M* week. The task was to draw a picture illustrating a holiday or theme for each month on a folded strip of paper. Stacey had led them through an example of this using a slot chart and pictures she had drawn. On the board she had written out some of the holidays. Darrin could not read or recognize most of these words, but he copied what he saw on the slot chart. Stacey's public reprimands for copying were again picked up by other students, recreating the teacher's stance toward both copying and Darrin:

> Frustrated, Stacey confronts Darrin. "What are you doing? What holiday is in February? What holiday is in March?" He can't answer. She says, "You may not copy my pictures if you don't know what you are doing. You don't have a clue! You go throw yours away and start all over again." He trudges over and throws his work in the trash. She gives him a new strip, then tells him, "You do this all the time and I'm putting a stop to it. You need to walk over and look at the board and think of your own pictures." Darrin walks to the board and stares at the words there.
>
> Two days later: Stacey continues with directions for the next activity (copying words that start with *m* and illustrating them). "What's the other rule—Darrin you know this rule." He nods.
>
> Krystal chimes in "Don't copy yours."
>
> "Right," nods Stacey.
>
> "Because then you don't know what it is," says Krystal. "Darrin always does that." Stacey shushes her, then briefly describes how she will know if they copied (she will ask them what the word is and if they know what it means they knew what they were doing). (fieldnotes, April 7 and April 9, 1997)

It is difficult to say whether the children really understood the reasons behind Stacey's position on copying or were parroting her reasons. It is not always clear when copying is good or bad: There are many times when copying is a legitimate form of practice. Several of Stacey's worksheets required students to copy alphabet letters or numbers for practice, and a frequent activity was copying words from cards. In addition, Thorkildsen (1989; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1991) found that young children (until about 7 years of age) see peer tutoring (even on tests) to be a fair and reasonable educational practice, enabling all students to do the work correctly. The following suggests that the children in Stacey's room did grasp that looking at

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each others' papers was not allowed, but did not fully understand the reasons. The task was to practice writing numerals and number words. Models for each are printed on a worksheet with a line for (legitimate) copying:

> Across from Eva and Nancy are Trina and Holly, who are also busily working. Holly asks them, "Why are you copying each other?"
>
> Nancy answers, "We're not!" Holly shoots back an inaudible comment with a bit of a sneer.
>
> Eva says, "We're not copying that."
>
> Trina accuses Nancy of copying, "Don't try to copy us." When Eva objects, she retorts, "Well she was trying to look at our papers." It's interesting that there is really nothing to "copy," as models of numerals and number words are written right on the paper. There is no original work to do. Stacey comes by and praises the girls. They work industriously. (Stacey, fieldnotes, January 15, 1997)

This is not to say that children did not collaborate surreptitiously when they thought a friend was in need of assistance—even during tests. In the following description, target children Maxine, Tommy, and Thad work on a test alongside Renee, who is a better reader. The test is given by a research assistant as part of the larger study:

> 9:12 Test begins. The task is to pick the picture that begins with the same beginning sound as the prompt. Tommy answers quickly. Maxine needs some prodding. She shows Renee her answer, Renee covers Maxine's paper for her. End of first page. Maxine sighs. Renee keeps trying to signal to her, gets reminded not to. All the kids are repeating the beginning sounds to themselves as they look at the pictures.

The observations in the fieldnotes of target students during literacy activities, presented earlier, provide evidence that the four aspects of activity structure described here influence students' construction of reading and writing, as well as their motivation to engage in specific tasks. To explore their influence on what children thought about reading and writing at the end of the school year, children's interviews were analyzed both qualitatively, through content analysis, and quantitatively, using their ratings of various items related to motivation.

Quantitative Analysis of Student Ratings

The quantitative analysis of student ratings was exploratory, as this type of rating had not been tried previously with children this age. Item responses were coded on a 4-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*low*), which indicated a strong negative view of reading or writing (or one's ability to read or write), to 4 (*high*), which indicated a strong positive view. Descriptive analyses of the students' ratings for each item revealed that most children viewed reading and writing positively: Means were high, and the modal response for all but one item ("reading is easy–hard") was 4 (see Table 4). Distributions in the four classrooms were similar across measures, with the majority of responses in the 3 to 4 range, except for "reading is easy–hard." In Stacey's class, the modal response was 1 (*very hard*) with progressively fewer responses in the higher range; Wendy's students' modal response was 2 *(kind of hard)*; and the other two teachers' modal responses were 4 *(very easy).* Students' ratings were generally consistent with the reasons they gave. Darrin, for example, said he really did not like to read (1) because "it's too boring." Occasionally, students gave surprising elaborations: When asked if he liked writing, Darrin gave a rating of 4 and said, "But I'm not very good at it, but I like it."

Principal components analysis of the reading and writing items separately revealed two reading factors (motivation and ability) and a single writing factor with eigenvalues greater than 1 and factor loadings above .5 for all items. Internal consistency of the responses to the items in each factor were quite modest, even for research purposes (α = .50 for reading ability and α = .68

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for writing). A repeated-measures analysis of variance with measure (motivation to read and positive stance toward writing) as the within-subjects variable and teacher as the between-subjects variable was performed. The homogeneity assumption for repeated measures was retained: Box's $M = 12.38$, $F(1, 9) = 1.32$, $p = .222$. Given the low reliability, it is perhaps not surprising that there were no significant effects for between- or within-subjects variables, *p*s $>.20$, and follow-up Tukey honestly significant difference tests revealed no differences in means between any pair of teachers on either measure.

DISCUSSION

The construction of literacy in kindergarten classrooms is an ongoing and complex social dance in which roles and activities are constantly negotiated among participants. It is clear that current theories of motivation—particularly, intentional theory (Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)—are useful in interpreting these results. However, the themes identified in this ethnographic study also extend our knowledge of how aspects of these theories play out in real classrooms to shape young children's motivation for literacy. The questions that framed this inquiry both guided the data collection and provided a way to evaluate the four themes identified in the data and their relation to students' motivation to read and write.

What are the Shared Contexts of Meaning That Constitute Literacy-Related Social Activity in These Classrooms?

The organization and structure of schoolwork can influence the saliency of individual differences in skill development—an issue of particular importance for children with disabilities. As McDermott (1993) stated, classroom lessons

> can be so well organized for putting the spotlight on those who are doing less well than the others that hiding becomes a sensible strategy for all of the kids some of the time and for some of the kids all the time. (p. 287)

When students worked on different tasks, opportunities for ability comparison were few. When engaged in tasks in which all students worked at the same time, differences were more obvious. The amount of time allowed for task completion also influenced how obvious individual differences became, as well as the importance attached to them.

Stacey's was not the only class in which students sometimes worked on uniform tasks; in fact, all four of the classes did. Three factors appeared to mitigate the potential drawbacks of this type of task structure. First, as in Wendy's and Patti's classrooms, individual differences in content can be overtly encouraged and celebrated. By commenting on the creativity or interestingness of the content, these teachers made it legitimate to look admiringly at each others' work, rather than to be concerned with relative speed. Sharing products more formally also conferred value on the product, rather than on finishing per se. Second, the time frame around uniform tasks can be modified, reducing the pressure to finish. Journal writing in Wendy's class was only the first of three or four literacy activities during prerecess instruction. When students finished, they continued to do reading and writing activities. Patti often provided fill-in literacy activities for those who finished the main task.

In three of the four classrooms, peer help or tutoring was allowed or even encouraged. Teachers did not highlight differences in reading skill; therefore, these young children seemed to take for granted that it was natural to give and receive help. As Patti stated in her interview, "Some of them are just learning to recognize the letters and don't have a clue that there's a sound associated with it, and I just want them to all feel successful wherever they are and that where they are is where they should be." For the most part, this goal played out as either collaboration (joint work on the same task) or as genuinely helping a peer accomplish her own goal. Although

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in two classrooms, negotiation of peer help was left to the children, Jan monitored this to ensure that children had a chance to do what they could without help.

In the context of meaningful work, this support, combined with support from adults, was enough to keep most students task involved and moving forward. When a task was so difficult or abstract as to have little meaning for students, as in the colors book task in Patti's room or some of the worksheet tasks in Stacey's room, copying the work of an adult or more able peer became a legitimate way to escape a bad situation in the eyes of students, even though not all teachers might agree. In Stacey's class, the combination of individual work on uniform tasks made it obvious who was having difficulty with the skills needed for first grade.

The relation between task structure and student motivation was not unidirectional. Not all students found the primary task (e.g., journal writing) to be as attractive as reading with a buddy or playing school. For Kelly (in Wendy's class), for example, social interaction seemed to be the most motivating aspect of any school task: As long as she was able to chat and interact while journal writing, she was reasonably satisfied. When a partner would finish and move to another literacy activity, Kelly would often grind to a halt unless an adult would come to her assistance. Assistance, in Kelly's view, was anything that helped her finish.[5]

How is the Construction of What it Means to Read and Write Enacted Within Particular Activity Structures?

A number of researchers have suggested that instructional contexts influence children's constructions of the nature of reading and writing (e.g., Freppon, 1991; McDermott, 1993; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Turner, 1995). As Turner noted, "The tasks that teachers select to foster important literacy goals represent to students what literacy is, why it is important, and what it can do" (p. 415). As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the responses children gave to interview questions about their own literacy motivation reflected their teachers' most frequent literacy tasks. One of the clearest potential relations between tasks and literacy motivation was through the reasons for reading and writing communicated by teachers through their use of "connections."

Although all four teachers worked to help children connect literacy to life beyond the classroom, the connections emphasized were quite different. Print had different social functions in the classrooms (Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984), and these were related to the connections the teachers tried to help children construct. Patti may have had the most complex set of connections between life and literacy—all of which provided opportunities for children to actively engage in literate activity and to use print for different purposes. She selected books, in part, to connect reading with children's lives. Books often related to a science or social studies unit or dealt with feelings and social relationships that would be meaningful to kindergartners. Reading and discussing these stories was sometimes accompanied by a discussion of authors or illustrators and their interests and motives; this was later turned around to describe the students themselves as authors and illustrators of texts. Student texts and art were prominently displayed and often discussed, further reinforcing the notion of reading and writing literature as a means of self-expression and communication. Interview data suggest that these interconnections helped students see themselves as active producers of meaningful

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[5]In first grade, Kelly was able to pursue her social goals during instructional time by becoming an expert "lesson dissembler" (Hansen, 1989). Her teacher, a first-year novice, would assign literacy seatwork while working with small groups on specific reading skills. Kelly would quietly go about arranging recess plans and carrying out other social tasks, while appearing to be engaged in legitimate activities (e.g., sharpening her pencil or discussing the literacy task). When she saw the teacher rise, she would immediately begin to work quickly on the task, accomplishing little more than the first items or sentences. The teacher would come by to check and, knowing her difficulty with reading, would praise her for her efforts. Over time, this had the effect of reducing Kelly's opportunities to learn to read and write; by the end of first grade, she had made little progress.

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text. Even students who struggled to write emphasized self-expression in their reasons for liking to write.

Wendy saw writing as a way to capture events and feelings and to communicate those with others. She harnessed the classroom standard of sharing time to help students experience this function. By capitalizing on children's need to tell about the fascinating events of their lives, children learned that one could tell their events and express their feelings through written texts; that what could be said could be written. Jan also worked toward this connection using "News of the Day" and weekend journals. This remained more highly scaffolded in Jan's classroom compared with Wendy's, due in part to the variability in English language competence coupled with the lack of time inherent in a half-time program. (First graders, who remained for the whole day, had additional extended opportunities to write.) Patti accomplished the connection between telling and writing the news by using a class newspaper that communicated class news to parents. In all of these examples, students were learning ways to represent their experiences and communicate them to others, critical forms of achievement in a literate society (Johnston, 1999). In all three classes, children mentioned these forms in their reasons for liking to write.

Although learning that what can be said can be written was one of Stacey's stated goals as well, the tasks she employed allowed students to enact this function in a limited fashion. Because she tightly controlled students' written output, student writing appeared to serve the teacher's purposes rather than students' own. Of course, writing served the teachers' purposes for the other three teachers as well. The difference is that, in the other three classrooms, students could and did perceive much of their writing to serve their own needs and interests. As Stacey pointed out in her interview, one of her most difficult tasks was in convincing her students that they needed to learn how to read and write.

To help children prepare to successfully negotiate first grade, Stacey frequently referred to first-grade performance standards and the consequences of failure to meet them. This emphasis represents literacy as a gatekeeper; stressing perfection may raise the stakes even further, particularly for students struggling with the most rudimentary notions of print (McDermott, 1993). This emerged in her students' responses to interview questions as an emphasis on ability (or lack thereof). Myers (1992) suggested that seeing reading and writing as valuable because they contribute to school success may lead students to transform all of the teachers' literacy objectives into a single purpose: "Do it so you can pass" (p. 301) In Stacey's room, there was evidence of this shared view of literacy work as work, both in the fieldnotes and in the teacher's own view of children's motivation expressed in the interview. From time to time, this motivation for doing literacy activities appeared in all four classrooms. The transformation of the e hunt from fascinating to mere schoolwork exemplified this: Wendy told me later that her assignment of letter hunts in subsequent days were not met with a similar enthusiasm. Despite the general interest of children in sharing their experiences, not all children were intrinsically motivated to write daily journal entries. Two target children expressed a dislike of journals; even Marty's increased motivation to write appeared to be a move from journal writing as drudgery. In Patti's class, this occurred most notably in the pattern task for the book on colors. When children do not understand or embrace the point of an assigned activity, their motivation becomes extrinsic; their goals become compliance and finishing.

What Do Individual Children (and Teachers) Contribute to This Flow of Literate Activity?

Throughout the data collection and analysis, it was clear that the four teachers had a great influence over the flow of literate activity in their classrooms through their selection of tasks, control over the duration of work time and manner of completion, and their use of feedback. However, students themselves, both individually and in groups, also modified this flow in important ways.

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The teachers in this study varied in their encouragement of student autonomy. Wendy seemed the most willing to let students' immediate interests influence or even change her plans, as long as her literacy goals were still served. The other three teachers tended to maintain control over the lesson itself, though Patti and Jan built student choice into many of the activities. Stacey maintained the most control over students' literate activity, allowing choice subject to her approval within planned tasks. The students in their classes, in turn, took these opportunities when offered and often made additional opportunities when faced with tasks that were too difficult, too abstract, or too uninteresting (Myers, 1992).

Perhaps because they knew she was open to change, students in Wendy's class took public opportunities to change the lesson structure. The e hunt is a good example of this. Wendy started the task with a simple circling of e's in text on the board, something that all of the teachers did at one time or another to help students increase their awareness of individual letters in words. When students' hunting spilled over into other print in the room, Wendy specifically sanctioned this; a very quiet child then feels comfortable enough to go to the teacher in mid-activity and report that his name contained an e, standing his ground even when Wendy initially asked him to return to his seat. Seeing student interest, Wendy added e hunts to the list of optional post-journal literacy activities, telling them to write each word that they found and circle the e. The students, however, changed this task into writing an e in their notebooks each time they found one in classroom print.

Students in the other three classes also modified tasks and procedures, on a smaller and more private scale. Often, this took the form of negotiating help or collaboration, and depending on the teacher's attitude toward various forms of assistance, were either more or less public. Patti, like Wendy, was not disturbed by students copying from each other or getting another student to actually write something for them. Jan and Stacey were less willing to allow this kind of help (except from an adult at times); generally, students were to do their own work. This did not prevent their students from negotiating forbidden forms of help when they saw it as necessary or useful, it just meant that these negotiations were more private. When possible, then, students adjusted the level of challenge in the task to meet their own needs, maintaining motivation to engage (Nicholls, 1989; Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993).

Researchers in both literacy and motivation have stressed the importance of student choice in maintaining interest in school tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Myers, 1992; Nicholls, 1989; Nolen, 1995; Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). Maintaining controlling rather than autonomy-supporting classroom environments may have long-term motivational consequences as well, particularly for students with learning disabilities. Grolnick and Ryan (1990) found that teachers reported exerting more control over learning disabled students, who in turn reported feeling that educational outcomes were largely in the hands of powerful others. Myers (1992) warned that lack of choice and ownership of writing can make school tasks less authentic, more disconnected with students' lives outside the classroom; a concern echoed by Nicholls and his colleagues (Nicholls et al., 1994).

Some of the reasons for Stacey's maintenance of tight control over literacy activities may be found in her explanation of her teaching goals. Understanding teachers' actions requires consideration of their motivations (Nicholls, 1989) and beliefs about their students (McDermott, 1993). Stacey worried about her students' preparation for first grade, based in part on her experience as a first-grade teacher at the school. Her goal was to have all students learn the kindergarten skills, but she believed that this was made more difficult by the lack of support at home for many of her students. Therefore, the lowest-achieving children were placed in a cluster so that they could receive additional help. The following occurred as children were lining up for recess one day in February:

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> While they are lining up, Stacey tells me that she has put the kids in this cluster arrangement (all my targets together) because they are having a lot of trouble (this explains the adults' hovering). She adds that she doesn't get any support from home for any of them, no matter whether she calls or sends notes home. "This class would be a lot farther along if we didn't have to always stop and wait for these five or six kids. My other (Tuesday/Thursday) class is a lot farther along, and you know why? Because they're bussed." I ask for clarification, and she explains that unlike that class, these kids are from "the neighborhood." The neighborhood in question is mostly small, rather shabby single-family homes. Many of them are rentals, and the people living here are largely working-class or working poor.

Believing that no one at home will hold these children accountable for learning to read and write, Stacey assumes she must do so at school. Because of their backgrounds, she perceived these children as preventing her from teaching the required skills to the rest of the class. In field experiments on teachers' controlling versus autonomy supportive practice (Flink, Boggiano, & Barrett, 1990; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986), this kind of perceived pressure has resulted in an increase in teachers' controlling behaviors; in turn, controlling environments are associated with lower student motivation and self-determination.

The other three teachers all stated that increasing students' motivation to read and write was their primary goal in kindergarten, and that specific skills, though important, were less important. It is possible that, feeling less pressured to accomplish certain learning objectives, these teachers were more free to allow increased student choice and more of a say in negotiating their literacy environments.

How Do the Individual Children's Reconstruction of Social Meaning of Literacy Change Over Time?

In this study, the primary means of assessing students' changing notions of literacy was through a combination of observation and teacher interview. Subtle internal changes were likely not picked up; the changes that were clear to the various adults were major ones. Some students changed from being reluctant participants to enthusiastic contributors by the end of the school year. For some, this was accompanied by development in social skills and relationships over the year. Others, though outwardly industrious, seemed to be in the process of withdrawal. Mallory (Stacey's class), for example, "didn't really like school very much," though she talked of reading and writing at home. This, and the fact that her teacher believed she had become more motivated to read and write during the year, suggests that multiple sources of data are necessary to understand the meaning of young students' behaviors.

The most abrupt change, perhaps, was when Marty went from being a very reluctant writer who sat for long periods staring at his blank journal page, to Wendy's "journal king." The key appeared to be the opportunity to immediately write about something he wanted to tell the class. Writing changed from being a school task to one serving Marty's own purposes (Myers, 1992). The memory task was not as demanding as that of recalling some event from the previous days, which may have made the writing itself somewhat easier. On the social side, the curiosity of others in response to his reading no doubt provided Marty with a sense that his words communicated and were valued by his peers. This may have been especially powerful to one as shy as Marty. Supported by his text, Marty may well have felt more secure in addressing the group during sharing time. The framework for this metamorphosis was established by Wendy's construction of journal writing as a form of communication in a safe environment.

Kevin, in Stacey's class, also went through a noticeable transformation during the year. In January, he had not figured out any way to complete the morning seatwork tasks other than copying from others or getting a lot of help from an adult. Faced with what seemed to him a

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nearly impossible task (independent completion), his attention wandered, and he was often reprimanded. At some point during February or March, Kevin began to crack the letter–sound correspondence code. At the same time, he discovered that being businesslike and completing tasks promptly earned him free time and praise from the adults. By the end of the year, he was feeling successful in class and was seen by his teacher as having come out of his shell a bit in reading. She viewed him as compliant rather than really engaged, and said he had started to ask questions "not in an argumentative way, just a clarifying way: 'OK, I really want to know what I'm supposed to do here.'" Kevin saw himself as not knowing how to read, but that he would do well in first grade because, "you can learn." What he seemed to have learned in Stacey's class was how to accomplish school tasks successfully, but he did not confuse that with literacy.

Students' Motivation as Definitions of Success

Nicholls and his colleagues (Nicholls, 1989; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1991, 1998) claimed that students' achievement motivation can best be understood in terms of their definitions of success. In the four classrooms described here, teachers emphasized different notions of successful literacy through the kinds of activity they designated as legitimate and through their reactions to students' work. These norms and expectations were often reiterated by students as they commented on their work and their peers' work. The children's developing motivation to engage in school literacy, then, depended in part on what it took to be successful given the nature of literacy encountered in the classroom. The clearest examples of this occurred with writing.

Through modeling, time allocation, and connections to students' own experiences, successful writing in Wendy's kindergarten class was defined as "getting your experiences down on paper so they can be shared with interested others." In doing this, she capitalized on young children's well-established motivation to tell about their own experiences; writing and illustrations became the media through which this occurred. Students were successful when they could produce and read aloud their texts, initially with help and ultimately more independently. Teacher feedback praised or prompted details and illustrations that matched the text; sharing time became both the reward and enactment of writing for an audience. Conventional correctness (e.g., spelling, punctuation) took a back seat to communicating ideas. For most students, this provided motivation to learn to write, as documented in both interview data and observations.

Although the focus of writing in Patti's room was on extending and producing stories, there were several elements in the definition of literacy constructed there that were similar to those in Wendy's room. The storybox activity, like journal sharing, built on children's existing motivation for pretend play by enlisting families to help turn children's play with the toy figures into story-like texts that were shared with the class. Both formal and informal opportunities for children to read and admire their peers' work were provided by covering the walls with their writing and artwork. Fieldnotes show many examples of children commenting positively on others' products. Whereas Wendy stressed communication of information, Patti emphasized creativity in all of her students by providing scaffolding through group brainstorming and attributing creativity and good ideas to all her students. When asked about writing in school, Patti's students stated that they liked writing stories (20%), telling about things that happen to them (20%), and drawing pictures (50%).

Fieldnotes in both Patti's and Wendy's classes captured many instances of children using their literacy skills, writing notes, or making pictures for each other, inscribed "To (*recipient*), Love (*sender*)."However, these free-choiceuses of literacy, as well as the extended time given over to reading and writing what for beginning students was extended text, depended on what Wendy called, "the luxury of time" enjoyed in a full-day kindergarten program. The time pressure

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inherent in half-day programs may be particularly detrimental to students at risk for reading and writing disability, for whom such time may be a necessity, rather than a luxury.

In Stacey's class, success meant (usually) independently finishing work. This seemed to be a function of her concern that children acquire the skills needed for first-grade success, and the constraints of a 2.5 days per week schedule. Adults often mentioned finishing, and often checked student papers to make sure they were well and truly finished. Those who finished first were often granted free time, whereas those for whom literacy was more difficult continued to work, linking speed with pleasant outcomes. (This was also the case in Jan's room, where one target student suggested that journal writing took too long, "and I want to do choice time.") Quicker students sometimes ended up with easier tasks (as in the completion activity "There's a hole in my ___ "), because Stacey was trying to ensure that everyone did their own work. It was perhaps more the combination of these factors rather than any single practice that led so many students in this class to raise ability issues when discussing motivation to read and write. For those like Leann and Darrin who had not cracked the code, tasks often baffled and frustrated them. Leann's lament that "I still don't have those numbers [letters] for 'chalk' yet. I'll never learn," may be the pre-cursor to the kind of disconnection from school found among older learning disabled elementary school students (Nicholls et al., 1997).

The data reported here extend motivation researchers' knowledge of how theoretical relations play out within real classrooms for young children. They suggest that there were different definitions of successful reading and writing in the four classrooms, definitions learned and carried out through literacy tasks and in talk among the members of the classroom culture. These definitions have different implications for the continuing motivation of students who struggle to read and write. In classrooms where reading and writing were used for multiple purposes, including communication, self-expression, and pleasure, and where these activities were supported by teacher and student assistance and collaboration, there was nothing to interfere with children's initial interest in reading and writing. Where reading and writing were more narrowly defined and primarily used for the teacher's purposes, there were indications that children saw school literacy tasks and real-life literacy as different entities. Teachers in three of the classrooms created frequent tasks that helped students make and strengthen the connections between school literacy and home life. This may be particularly important for students with learning disabilities, who are more likely than nonlearning disabled students to see school-work as artificial and irrelevant to their lives outside school (Nicholls et al., 1994; Nicholls et al., 1996).

In all four classrooms, reading and writing were clearly important in the social structure, though in different ways. In Wendy's class, writing was a means of communicating important information to the teacher and peers, perhaps strengthening the sense of belonging to the group. In Patti's class, literacy activities provided multiple opportunities for collaboration and peer helping, and were explicitly and implicitly related to peer relations in the classroom. Stacey made it clear that literacy skills were especially important for future school success, and students appeared to take this message to heart.

The importance of reading and writing in these classes raises the stakes for students with disabilities or for whom learning to crack the code is an arduous and often confusing task. The nature and availability of supports for these students becomes critical in maintaining their motivation to learn. In classrooms where peer collaboration and assistance were encouraged, support for these students was more abundant. In Stacey's class, legitimate assistance could only come from an adult, to prevent students from appearing capable when they were not. Because this reduced the total amount of support available to struggling students, they often did not complete tasks during work time and were perceived by the teacher as slowing the progress of the class as a whole.

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Most kindergartners were still interested in reading and writing by the end of the year and hopeful that they would continue to learn; there were no differences among classrooms in students' motivation ratings. This reflects the optimism of the age, their difficulty in comparing their own performance with group norms, and firm belief in the role of effort in learning (Nicholls, 1989). As children grow older, they develop the capacity to compare their abilities to those of their peers. At the same time, the importance of reading and writing skill for success in most other school subjects grows each year. Although average or above average readers will likely continue to read and write in these changing conditions, children who continue to struggle with literacy may lose hope.

Differences in classroom literacy cultures may mitigate the implications of this development for the motivation of students with disabilities. This ethnographic study shows multiple ways in which teachers and students work to create literacy cultures and suggests possibilities for teachers hoping to encourage the motivation of students who struggle with literacy. It remains for further longitudinal work to discover whether similar strategies can protect the motivation of older students who continue to read and write with difficulty.

Acknowledgments

Preparation of this article was supported by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Grant P50 HD 33812–02. My deep gratitude goes to the participating teachers and children who welcomed me into their classrooms. Thanks to Reed Stevens for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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TABLE 1

Frequent Literacy Activities

Classroom	Activity Observed	Target Students[a]
Patti	Brainstorming before independent work (4/8); Making connections between literacy and life: natural world, families, social life (5/8); Direct instruction (4/8); Choice time (5/8); **Literature-related art projects** (story extensions, 2-D, 3-D, acting, 6/8); **Sharing student writing** (6/8); **Teacher reading books aloud** (6/8)	Sally: I like making stories up, Nell: I like to write about people that I miss, Cathy: You can make some stories up, Mallory: (Kind of like writing) I don't know (why)
Wendy	Children reading aloud (6/7); Children reading silently (6/7); Making connections between literacy and life, note taking, journals (6/7); Choice time (literature-related activity only) (6/8); **Children, teacher journal writing (7/7)**; Teacher modeling purposes of writing (5/7); Teacher reading books aloud (6/7)	Marina: I like writing about things I did; Marty: At the end of the year you can take your journal home and show your parents; Carrie: Journals are boring; Kelly: I like writing names, but (I don't like journals) because I don't know how to write.
Stacey	**Worksheets–activities requiring a single letter or word (8/8); Letter-related art (letter art, illustrate word, collage objects beginning with specific letter, 8/8)**; Making connections between literacy and life—preparation for first grade (7/8)	Kevin: Making pictures for my mom; Thad: Writing houses, buildings, fire trucks; Leann: I always use up all my paper. I can draw really good pictures of the seasons and my parents; Darrin: I'm not good at it, but I like it. Maxine: I don't like school very much. My mom taught me how to write words.
Jan	**Connections between literacy or literature and life (4/6)**; Calendar activities (3/6); Weekend journals (Mondays only: 2/6); Teacher reading books aloud, discussion (3/6); Literature-related art projects (visual arts or drama; 3/6); Phonemic instruction or group practice (3/6)	Damian: I like to write Space Jam and Jurassic Park. I like to write different kinds of things, like pictures of cats, sea otters, walrus …; Alice: I really like to write. [Journal writing is] ok sometimes. It takes too long and I want to have choice time.

Note. Items in bold type reflect those that occurred most frequently in that classroom.

[a]Student quotes from interview: Elaborations on why they liked or did not like to write in school.

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TABLE 2

Proportion of Children in Each Class Who Mentioned Each Aspect of Writing When Asked Whether or Not They Liked to Write

Aspect	Wendy	Patti	Stacey	Jan
Writing words	16	5	13	0
Drawing pictures	32	50	58	35
Writing stories	0	20	4	9
Recording own experiences	28	20	4	4
Sharing own writing	16	5	0	0
Writing at home	4	20	38	4
Writing is fun (unelaborated)	12	5	21	35
Ability references	4	0	25	4
Writing is hard	8	20	0	26
Total interviewed	24	20	24	24

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TABLE 3

Social Structure of Literate Activity: Collaboration Versus Individual Work

Classroom	Activity
Wendy	Small and large groups working together with or without adult; individual tasks, helping, scribing; uniform and multiple task structures; emphasis on communication and craft.
Patti	Small and large groups with or without adult, many tasks can be done either alone or collaboratively (kids' choice), ideas often brainstormed before independent tasks, uniform and multiple task structures, emphasis on creativity and communication
Jan	Large group instruction and recitation with adult, individual tasks and helping is encouraged (although not actually doing work for another child), uniform and multiple task structures, emphasis on getting as many kids as possible involved in literacy activities
Stacey	Large group instruction with adult; independent seatwork, adults monitor, assist; Chat is OK if you do your own work; uniform task structure only; emphasis on finishing correctly and on time

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TABLE 4

Descriptive Statistics for Reading and Writing Items ($N = 92$)

Item	Mode	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
Like to read	4	3.03	1.06	−0.683	−0.863
Like to check out library books	4	3.28	0.94	−1.083	0.062
Will do well in reading next year	4	3.14	0.98	−0.937	−0.150
Like to hear stories read to me	4	3.48	0.82	−1.465	1.250
Like to look at books by myself	4	2.99	1.02	−0.547	−0.940
Like to go to the library	4	3.10	1.07	−0.821	−0.550
Reading is easy	2	2.49	1.08	0.081	−1.267
Like to write	4	3.45	0.79	−1.118	0.012
Like to write words on drawings	4	3.10	1.07	−0.859	−0.594
Will do well in writing next year	4	3.25	0.94	−1.004	−0.104
Like to write stories–write in journals	4	3.33	0.98	−1.265	0.357
Like to practice writing my letters	4	3.09	1.01	−0.697	−0.777
Writing is easy	4	2.98	1.11	−0.648	−0.986

Note. Responses given on a 4-point scale ranged from 1 (*very negative*), 2 (*kind of negative*), 3 (*kind of positive*), to 4 (*very positive*).